

**Introduction:****Blank slide**

Continuing our series in the gospel of John, Our Scripture today is John 18:1-27, which provides us with John's account of Jesus' arrest, of Peter's denial, and of Jesus' trial before the Jewish authorities. Like many of you, I am a sucker for top ten lists, so since today's Scripture includes Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus, I went looking for a list of the top ten traitors. In doing so Google also came up with a list of the top ten traits of a man, which was useless; it included the trait that a real man had to have at least three suits, one of which was a pinstripe! I mean to say! But this led me to a blog by Trey Morgan, a pastor in Texas. He had a list of what it takes to be a real dad, and since this is fathers' day I thought it worth sharing:

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- Be there for your kids.
- Read to your children.
- Be a good role model.
- Spend time one-on-one with each child.
- Treat the mother of your children with respect.
- Pray together.
- Play together.
- Help with your children's home work.
- Set clear, consistent limits.
- Listen to your children.
- Know your children's friends.
- Go with your children to church.
- Take your children to work with you.
- Be affectionate.
- Read the Bible together.

But back to the top ten traitors of all time. The list included some well-known names, such as Benedict Arnold, Marcus Junius Brutus, a nephew of Julius Caesar who participated in his assassination, and Vidkun Quisling, a Norwegian general who assisted Hitler's invasion of his country. It also included one I had never heard of: Wang Jingwei, a Chinese leader who had traitorous dealings with the Japanese government during the second world war. But the number one traitor in the list was no surprise; it was Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus with a kiss.

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Our Scripture today gives us an account that differs in several ways from the accounts in the other three gospels, consistent with John's emphasis on Jesus as the Son of God. And it gives us a wonderful insight into how our Lord's response to the situation differed so amazingly from the responses of the other men involved.

Let us look at the first part of our passage, John 18:1-13

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John 18:1-9

When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

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"I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?"

And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

"I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

Let us look at the actions of four people nor groups of people: Judas Iscariot, Simon Peter, the Annas/Caiaphas duo, and our Lord Jesus,

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#### **1. Judas Iscariot: a greedy heart**

The betrayer Judas has been a puzzle to believers; how could someone who spent three years in Jesus' presence, hearing His teaching and seeing His miracles, how could such a man then turn around and betray his teacher and Lord? The answer lies in his heart, which was fundamentally looking out only for himself; it was greedy heart. We met Judas before in John's gospel. In chapter 12 we find him objecting to Mary pouring perfume on Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair:

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John 12:4-6

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

So we see here what may be one of the roots of Judas' betrayal. Probably he had answered Jesus' call with the expectation (like the other disciples) that Jesus was going to establish His kingdom on earth, and that he and the others would be rewarded with riches and honor in the new kingdom. But note that his dishonesty was not obvious; only in hindsight could John record his dishonesty. And this is clear when we consider the next passage about Judas; it comes in chapter 13, during the Last Supper:

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John 13:21-30

After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me."

His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant.

So it seems that none of the other disciples had a clue that Judas was a traitor, which also means that they did not have a clue that he was a thief.

So here is Judas, guiding a detachment of soldiers to capture Jesus. The words "detachment of soldiers" refers to a Roman cohort, usually of 500 men, but almost certainly much smaller here. They bring torches, even though it is the full moon of the Passover, and they come with enough arms and soldiers to capture dozens of criminals, so either Judas or his paymasters are taking no chances. John does not record Judas' fatal kiss, instead choosing to record Jesus' calm acceptance of God's plan for salvation, but nevertheless we know that the kiss was given and Judas' treachery was complete.

So what can we learn from Judas and his treachery? There are several lessons, but here are just two:

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*a. Money is a good servant but a terrible master.* At least part of the reason for Judas' treachery was that he loved money so much that he was willing to steal from the common purse of the disciples and ultimately to betray his Lord for 30 pieces of silver.

Matt 26:14-16

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

But he had failed to grasp the teaching he heard from Jesus himself;

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Mark 8:35-38 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? Judas was greedy for money, and it cost him his life and his soul.

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2. *It is possible to be religious without having a saving faith in Jesus.* Judas was one of the 12; he was on intimate terms with Jesus and the other eleven disciples; he had even gone out on a mission trip and seen miracles, and yet he did not have a saving faith in Jesus. When push came to shove he decided that money was more important than justice and personal gain was more important than truth, and he betrayed his Lord to a cruel and unjust fate.

Let us learn from Judas' huge mistake to trust our Lord and His grace and mercy, and never to betray Him by our thoughts, our words, or our deeds.

**2. Simon Peter: Hot head and cold feet**

Peter features prominently in two places in this story, and in both cases he is not portrayed in a flattering light. The first incident is in the garden at the time of Jesus' arrest. Peter, who had earlier declared his intention to die with Jesus if necessary:

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John 18:10-11

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

Here we see Peter in hotheaded mode. His Lord is being arrested; what can he do? He draws his sword (there were only two swords shared by the disciples, but we are not surprised that Peter has one of them) and he lashes out at one of the company; not a soldier, but only a servant of the high priest. Fortunately the man ducks, and Peter's blow aimed for the head cuts off his ear instead. Luke records that Jesus heals the man's ear, but John simply records Jesus rebuke to Peter. "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" We will come back to the second part of this statement in a few minutes, but as far as Peter was concerned this was a rebuke. Jesus was saying in effect "Peter, you are going about this the wrong way. You are getting in the way of God's plan for my life, so cease and desist from your hotheaded actions."

The second incident shows us Peter with cold feet. To his credit he does not run away with the other disciples, but he follows Jesus, right into the courtyard of the high priest:

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John 18:12-16

Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

John does not record the identity of this other disciple who was known to the high priest, but it was probably John himself. He was a fisherman, but he was also of a priestly family; his mother was most probably Salome, who was a sister of Mary the mother of Jesus and a cousin of Elizabeth, who was a descendant of Aaron, so this would make John also a descendant of Aaron. In addition his family appears to have been prosperous, and would very possibly have had an office in Jerusalem, so it is very reasonable to suppose that John was known to the high priest. In any event, this disciple's knowledge of the high priest was Peter's entry ticket into the warmth of the high priest's courtyard. But before he gets there he has to answer a question.

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John 18:17

"You are not one of his disciples, are you?" the girl at the door asked Peter.  
He replied, "I am not."

This question was not particularly threatening; after all John (or whoever the other disciple was) had not been challenged or harassed. But Peter is now in cold feet mode; he has seen Jesus arrested without a fight and without any display of his miraculous powers, and he must have been wondering what was next. So he denies any knowledge of Jesus.

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John 18:18

It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

So Peter now joins the group standing around a charcoal fire to keep warm. It would not have given off much heat, and so the people would have had to crowd together to keep warm. And this brings him two further questions:

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John 18:25-27

As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?"  
He denied it, saying, "I am not."

One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

So Peter has now denied Jesus three times, just as our Lord predicted. Luke records that at this moment Jesus looked at Peter, and Peter remembers Jesus' prediction and went outside and wept bitterly. John is saying "both Judas and Peter betrayed Jesus; Judas by leading the guard to him, and Peter by denying on oath that he knew him. At this time both are equally guilty. But only one found forgiveness and restoration. Why was Peter forgiven and not Judas? Because Peter truly repented of his sin, as is shown by his bitter tears and by his subsequent encounter with Jesus in a resurrection appearance that is veiled for us, and then later by the Sea of Galilee. John is saying to us, in effect, in the words of the hymn

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"There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin,  
there's a door that is open and you may go in,  
at Calvary's cross is where you begin,  
when you come as a sinner to Jesus."

So Judas' betrayal warns us against being religious without a saving faith in Jesus, while Peter's betrayal and later forgiveness remind us that our Lord is a God of infinite mercy and compassion, who delights to forgive those who come to Him in repentance and faith.

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### **3. Annas and Caiaphas: hateful hearts**

Our third party is actually two people; the high priests Annas and Caiaphas.

How can there be two high priests, you ask? Surely there should only be one! So here is the explanation. When the Romans put Judea under direct rule in 6 AD they appointed Annas, then just 28 years old, as the high priest, and under Jewish law he would have served as high priest for life. He was however deposed by the procurator Gratus in 15 AD for imposing and executing capital sentences which had been forbidden by the imperial government. Although he was removed from office he still exerted effective control through his five sons and son-in-law Caiaphas. His son Eleazar was high priest for two years, and then his son-in-law Caiaphas became high priest in AD 18 and remained in this position until about AD 36. After Caiaphas four other sons of Annas

held the position until the mid 60s. So although Caiaphas was high priest under Roman law, the Jews would have viewed Annas as the legitimate high priest, and he was certainly the power behind the throne. So in a real sense there were two high priests in Judea in Jesus' time, and it was this duo of high priests who conducted the trial of Jesus. John is the only gospel writer to tell us of the initial trial under Annas,

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John 18:19-24

Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

"I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said."

When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded.

"If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.

The major thing that we can note about Annas and Caiaphas is that the whole arrest and trial of Jesus was illegal, for several reasons; one web site I checked listed 15 illegalities in Jesus' trial. We will not only a few:

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- a. Jesus' trial was carried out at night. According to (Mishna, Sanhedrin 4:1), capital cases could not be tried at night. "Let a capital offense be tried during the day, but suspend it at night."
- b. The trial was too short (Mishna, Sanhedrin 4:1): "A criminal case resulting in the acquittal of the accused may terminate the same day on which the trial began. But if a sentence of death is to be pronounced, it cannot be concluded before the following day."
- c. Jesus' sentencing was announced in an unlawful place. It was illegal to sentence someone to die in any location other than the Great Sanhedrin's appointed place, which was a chamber in Jerusalem's temple known as the chamber of hewn stones. But Jesus was sentenced in the high priest's house.
- d. Annas and Caiaphas hated Jesus, and in Jewish law no one with a personal interest in the case could be a judge.

One commentator writes:

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"The pages of human history present no stronger case of judicial murder than the trial and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, for the simple reason that all forms of law were outraged and trampled under foot in the proceedings instituted against Him." (Walter M. Chandler, *The Trial of Jesus from a Lawyer's Standpoint*, p. 216.)

So we have the supposed guardians of the law acting in an illegal way. What possessed them to act in this way? It can only be that they hated him. Jesus was innocent of the charges against him, but was nevertheless sentenced to death by this kangaroo court.

So why did all this happen? To answer this we need to look finally at the fourth key person in the proceedings, namely our Lord Jesus Christ.

**4. Jesus. A pure heart**

It is with relief that we can finally turn to Jesus, the man at the center of the proceedings. Far from being a puppet in the hands of the Jews and the Romans, he was fully in control of the every aspect of the situation. Let us look again now at the first verses of the chapter to understand this.

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John 18:1-14

When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of

soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

Note first that Jesus went to the olive grove that we know as the Garden of Gethsemane after he had finished praying for his disciples. Why is this significant? Precisely because it was a place where he often went, so he knew that Judas also knew the place and would know how to find him there. He was deliberately making it easy for Judas to find him!

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John 18:4

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"  
"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

He knew, yes even from eternity past he knew of the scourgings and the humiliation and the crown of thorns and the nails through his hands and feet and the flies buzzing around his head and the wrenching pain of lifting himself up to breathe. And he also knew of the black night of his soul when the sins of the world would be laid on him and his Father would turn his face away and he would cry out "My God, why have you forsaken me?"

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John 18:4-6

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"  
"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.  
"I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

Jesus' words "I am he" in Greek are just "I am", with the "he" being understood. But "I am" is also the name of Yahweh, and Jesus' words have such an effect on the soldiers and guards that they drew back and perhaps stumbled over each other as they fell down. Clearly this was no ordinary person they were coming to arrest! John is making the point that even here, in this scene of confusion and torches and a jostling crowd, "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."

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John 18:7-9

Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?"  
And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."  
"I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

Here Jesus is protecting his disciples; they are crucial to the future of the church, and he was fulfilling his promise that none of them would be lost. He, and not the Roman guards, would decide who was going to be arrested

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John 18:10-11

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! *Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?*"

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Luke 22:39-43 we read of Jesus agony in the garden of Gethsemane before his arrest:

"He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

He had prayed this prayer and agonized over it and had accepted his Father's will, and so now he calmly says "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

Here is the clearest evidence that Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. He knew that his death was the only way to avert God's just judgment on sin; his death was the only way for sinful men and women to be forgiven and adopted into God's family. And so he says to Peter "don't try to stop me. Put your sword away, I am doing this God's way and not man's way."

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John 18:12-14

Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people."

John makes his final point about the purpose of Jesus death by quoting the cynical words of Caiaphas. They were spoken only a few days earlier, when the Jewish leaders were trying to figure out what to do about Jesus, and (John 11:49-50) "one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."" He was saying in effect "Let's get rid of Jesus, and then the Romans will leave us alone", but he was actually speaking a much deeper truth, because the one God-man Jesus was to die for the whole nation, and not just the Jewish nation but all nations and peoples of the world.

There is much more to say about this passage, but our time is up. If you remember nothing more, please give your thanks that one man has died for the people, and that this includes you and me. So give thanks for the great sacrifice that was made for you, and renew your obedience to the one who gave his all for you and for me.

One way to do this is to meditate on Ann Cousin's beautiful words.

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"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."

May we humbly rejoice and be thankful for the healing that Christ's bruising has brought to us.