

# John's Gospel; Journey to the Cross

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Date: 23 March 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] And if you have your Bibles, turn with me to John chapter 18. If you're using a church Bible, that's on page 1086. We have finished our series in Revelation. Now we're coming to another part of the Bible that John wrote, this time his gospel. We're following the journey to the cross as we move towards Easter, and we begin here in chapter 18, verses 1 to 11, where we come to Jesus' arrest. And with God's help, we'll see beauty beyond betrayal in this section. So let's again hear God's Word. When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side, there was a garden, 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 garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the 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. 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?

Jesus of Nazareth, they said. Jesus answered, I told you that I am he. 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. 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? We'll leave our reading there. So as I said, this gospel, written by the same friend of Jesus, the same apostle who wrote the book of Revelation, one of Jesus' inner circle of three, James and Peter and John. So what we have here is eyewitness history, but from a particular point of view, it's noticed of John as he writes his gospel that he has a particular interest, some have said, in the soul of Jesus, and especially how Jesus reflected on his identity as the Son of God. And we'll see that here in this section. We come to this scene of a terrible betrayal. We discover here among the disciples who have spent three years or so with Jesus, there is a traitor. Now, I don't know how many of us watched the TV show *The Traitors*. I missed that. I did a little bit of homework, watched a few minutes of it. I know enough to know it was a game based on deception, definitely a level of skill, learning who to trust, who not to trust. If you watch the show,

I guess you know that you had to be really ruthless in order to survive. Could the faithful find the traitors to win the cash prize, or would the traitors win out? It's become a bit of a global phenomenon.

It's here in the UK, it's in the States, it's in Australia and other places as well. It works as a concept because I think we know that betrayal is wrong, that playing the traitor is wrong, but it kind of works as game show. But we know in our own experience, I imagine, the betrayal is no game. It is no joke. When you share a secret with someone and you discover your confidence is broken. And when you thought someone was loyal to you and you discover they've switched sides and have turned against you. And when you place your hope in a particular relationship and you find that the other breaks that relationship. Betrayal, the theme of so many classic songs through every decade, Marvin Gaye, Bon Jovi, Taylor Swift, all of them recognizing that betrayal hurts. We know this. There is a shock. There is a sadness. It can really affect our ability to trust other people when we experience it. And then we can think differently. We can think about history and history records some terrible, infamous betrayals. Think about the story of Julius Caesar, 44 BC. Maybe we learned this in school. He was assassinated by a group of Roman senators, which famously included his former friend Brutus. And it's recorded that Caesar's last words were, eh, too, Brutus, and you too, Brutus. Or here in Britain, Guy Fawkes, 1605, wanting to have a Catholic king back on the throne

working together with the Spanish. And it had this failed plot to blow up the parliament buildings. And every year we remember that attempt at terrible betrayal with bonfires night, with fireworks to remember. But without question, the most infamous betrayal of all is the one that we've just read, the betrayal of Judas Iscariot. Think about it. One of the worst insults that you can throw at someone if you think that they are guilty of betrayal is to call them a Judas. It was terrible to betray a friend. It's terrible to betray a nation. How awful to betray the Son of God, the Savior of the world. So this morning we're going to be examining this story of betrayal. And what I want us to do is to really to map it onto the story of our world and to see it as it takes place in our own lives as well. It's not just a story for then and a problem for

[ 6 : 54 ] Judas. It's something that we all need to see our place in. So we're going to see the betrayal, but we are also going to see the beauty beyond the betrayal. As we recognize Jesus is not here as a passive victim. He is not surprised by this nighttime conspiracy of evil. He knows God's plan of salvation.

He knows where His story is heading. He knows that His hour of suffering and glory is now here. And so against the dark backdrop of sin and evil and betrayal, the awesome beauty of our Savior's love shines for us. John had told us earlier that Jesus and Jesus Himself said, I am the light of the world, I am the light of the world. And the light always overcomes the darkness.

Every time we switch on our bedside lamp in the morning, we are reminded that light wins over darkness. And we see it here, and we see it in the gospel. And in Jesus' story of faithful obedience, in the face of this terrible betrayal, there is promise for us.

There is promise of a love that endures, of a hope that is certain, of recovery, if we feel that we too are part of this betrayal. So three very simple things for us to think about today. First, we're going to think about the garden, because it's important for us to notice where this happens. Maybe some of you have read or you have seen *Wuthering Heights*, written by Emily Bronte. It is possibly the novel where it's recognized that the location really plays its part in driving the story on. So it's set in the Yorkshire moors, and there's the wild landscape, and there's the wild weather that seem to mirror the turbulent emotional life of the main character, some of the actions of the characters. There's revenge, there's obsession, and it's all seen in the wild, rugged landscape. The setting is crucial to the storyline.

It's absolutely true here also that the garden is crucial to the storyline, to the storyline of God's story of redemption. Let's see, first of all, how this garden matters to Jesus. Verse 2, we're told that Judas knew the place because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. In this garden, the Son of God came to spend time with his friends. It was a known place. In verse 4, Jesus came to this garden knowing all that was going to happen to him. So Jesus comes to the garden, a place that was known to him, and where others knew, that's where he spent time with his disciples. And this is telling us in this moment, this crucial moment, Jesus will not run and hide. He knows where he is coming, but he will deliberately choose to walk the road of obedience, suffering, and death in order to accomplish salvation for his people. Jesus coming to the garden is a reminder of his commitment to you and to me if we love him. But we also understand that in a very different way, the garden matters to Judas.

[ 10 : 45 ] Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place. So Judas came to the garden, guiding the detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. For Judas, this garden becomes the ideal location for betrayal. Takes place at nighttime, so it's quiet. The crowd have gone to their homes.

It's outside of the city. Again, it's more secluded. And so Judas comes to the garden, leading this mixed mob to arrest Jesus. It's very unusual to see Romans and Jews working together, but there's that principle, you know, the enemy of my enemy is my friend. We absolutely see this here in people's conspiring to get rid of Jesus. So the garden matters to Jesus and Judas, but we also need to understand that the garden matters to John as he writes his gospel. I'm just going to show us really briefly how this becomes a focus of his story. So we see it here. The betrayal is identified as happening in the garden. If you skim over to chapter 18, verse 26 and 27, here's Peter. 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 garden? Again, Peter denied it. In that moment, a cock began to crow. So the garden connects with

Peter in his denial. Chapter 19, verse 41, at the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden, a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. So the story of Jesus'

death and burial is connected deliberately by John to a garden. And so too, when it comes to the resurrection, we are reminded of location. As Jesus, in his risen state on Easter Sunday, appears to Mary, he asked her, woman, this is chapter 20, verse 15, woman, why are you crying? Who is it you're looking for? Thinking he was the gardener. She said, sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you have put him. So why does she think he's the gardener? Because it takes place, Jesus has risen in the garden.

So the garden location is really important to John in his gospel at the end. But I also want to remind us that at the beginning of John's gospel, he speaks about Jesus, the Word who was with God, the Word who was God, the Word who is active in creation, bringing life to creation. So John, in his gospel, wants us to take us, wants to take us back to the beginning, to creation, and to another garden, to the first garden, to the garden of Eden, so that we understand that one of the reasons Jesus has come into this world is to undo the curse, is to restore what was ruined by Adam and his fall into sin. And there's significant parallels between what happens in Jesus' garden and the garden of Eden. That first garden, the garden of Eden, was a paradise place, a place of beauty, a place of perfect relationship, a place of friendship with God. But then what happened?

Evil came in. The serpent came in. And what happened in the garden is a betrayal took place. Sin is a parting from God. Sin is betrayal. Adam was the first to be guilty of the betrayal of sin.

[14:32] And in that moment, all of history was impacted. All of us, by nature, we now turn our back on God. John Owen would say sin is our inbred traitor. There is this force within us that opposes God.

That opposes the purposes of God. That opposes the goodness and grace of God. So that without the help of God and the work of Jesus, we would say no. So that was the garden of Eden. But what about this garden, Jesus' garden? It's no longer a paradise because of sin. And for Jesus, the Son of God, as He comes here, it's much more like a wilderness place. It's like an exile. This is the beginning where Jesus is so conscious that He is the sin-bearer of the world, and He will be forsaken by His Father.

Here is a place where friendship with the Son of God is rejected. Into this garden, once again, evil comes. This time, men bearing swords and clubs.

But unlike Adam, in the garden, Jesus will not sin. He surrenders to do His Father's will. And the significance of what happens in Jesus' garden, including the cross, including the empty tomb, including the resurrection, impacts history, impacts eternity. Because what Jesus accomplishes for us in the garden is the defeat of death itself. By His work of the cross and the resurrection, He breaks the power of sin. He wins victory over Satan. And He gives hope to you and to me of forgiveness and a place in, to go back to Revelation, the eternal garden city.

Now, before we leave the garden, I think it's really easy when we come to a story like this, and maybe especially to Judas' story, to say, ah, this betrayal, it is a problem out there. It was a problem for that one. It was a problem for Judas. Actually, this is something that authors would say we've been doing ever since the Nazis came. It's really easy for us to say, ah, the problem of evil, the problem of sin, are those people over there. You know, the excesses, the awful realities of people like the Nazis. And so we can excuse ourselves, because we think the problem is entirely over there.

[17:13] It's interesting that Solzhenitsyn, the Russian author, he recognized that. So about three decades later, he was trying to persuade the world that the evil was still happening within the Soviet Empire.

And the one thing that he said that's become famous is that the dividing line between good and evil ultimately runs through every human heart. That this reality of betrayal is something we all need to wrestle with. I think it's helpful for us to see this mob coming against Jesus as a picture of humanity and human sin. Since the Garden of Eden, by instinct, we do not want God as King over us.

That we too would gladly arrest Jesus to get Him out of our lives. That we understand from the Bible that God the Creator has sent Jesus to be the Savior, to offer friendship and love, but by instinct we don't want to know. So this morning we're invited to look again at Jesus.

To recognize that in love He was willing to die for your betrayals and mine. Willing to bear our guilt and our shame. So that as we come to the story of the garden, it doesn't need to end for us with hopelessness, with our betrayal of God, but it can end with blessing from God if we trust the one who came into the garden to save us. That kind of takes us to our second point, to ask the question, who is Jesus, who is the greatest of the world? And to see His glory here in a surprising place.

Years ago, probably the best part of 30 years ago, when they were at the height of their powers, I think, the band Radiohead came to play in Glasgow. They put up a big tent on Glasgow Green, and they played this massive, amazing concert, thousands of people packed in. What was funny to me was the next time I saw, the lead singer's called Tom York, and next time I saw Tom York, he's a very small man, I saw him walk down Buchanan Street carrying some shopping bags. Not really much sense of glory and wonder, most people passed him by. And you probably have your stories of meeting celebrities in unexpected places.

[ 19 : 46 ] Another theme that we find in the story of the garden connects us to the theme that runs through John's gospel of the identity of Jesus, and also this idea that God's glory is often seen in really unexpected places.

Think about some of the stories that we have in the Bible. Here is Moses, and he's a shepherd, and he's in the wilderness, and all of a sudden he sees the glory of God in a burning bush that never burns up. Or we go to the book that we've been studying in the evenings, the book of Jonah, and here we see the glory of God showing mercy to a wicked city of Nineveh.

Or we could go to the whole story of Jesus' ministry on earth, and we see a kingdom welcome be extended to thieves and prostitutes and lepers, and we understand that there is something in God that loves to show His glory in surprising places. And here is another one. In the darkness of this night, in the darkness of this evil, soldiers, officials, we ourselves come face to face with the glory of God.

Again, just to recognize that Jesus is in full control of the situation, which perhaps seems surprising. You know, here's this great kind of crowd, and they're fully armed, and they're ready for action. But Jesus is in control. Two times, Jesus goes out, verse 4 and verse 7, and He asks them, who is it you want? And they say, Jesus of Nazareth. And two times, Jesus responds, verse 5 and verse 8, I am He. Now that sounds fairly simple, straightforward, until we recognize how important the title, I am, the name I am is in the Bible.

So again, to go to the story of Moses, Exodus 3, Moses asked, when people ask, what's your name, what shall I tell them? And he said, I am who I am. And John loves to record the fact that Jesus describes Himself as the great I am. Jesus says to us in so many different places, I am God in the flesh. I am God, the great redeemer of my people. John records seven famous I am sayings. I am the bread of life. I can give food and satisfaction. I am the light of the world, a true revelation of God's glory in the way of salvation. I am the good shepherd laying down His life to bring His sheep home to God. I am the resurrection and the life. And now here, when as it were, the world comes together to judge Jesus, to get rid of Jesus, we see the Lord Jesus showing God's glory once more. I am He. And did you notice what happens in verse 6? When Jesus said, I am He, the soldiers, the chief priests, the Pharisees, they drew back and fell to the ground. That's a posture of worship. That Jesus, as He is being arrested, receives worship. Here is a response to the presence of the glory of God.

[ 23 : 20 ] Here is them recognizing we see something unique in Jesus. Here is the reality that God the Father is going to make absolutely sure that His Son receives honor as He goes to the cross.

So He receives worship. Sadly, those people who bow in a posture of worship will then come to arrest Him and want to get rid of Him. But He receives worship because He is the Son of God with all glory.

And He also is seen as glorious in the way He cares for His followers. It's amazing, isn't it? Jesus answered, I told you I am He. If you're 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. So Jesus is going to be a rock-solid Savior for His people. He said that my followers are in My hands, they're in My Father's hands, and I'll not lose one of those I came to save. And here is Jesus in this moment protecting His followers. Another thing this means is that Jesus will go to the cross alone.

He walks this path alone as He bears guilt and burden and our debt of sin. And so in the darkness of our sin, in the darkness of this conspiracy of evil, the light of Jesus' glory shines.

I don't know if any of you have been to any of the Scottish dark sky parks that have kind of been set up in the last few years. There's one down in the Galloway Forest. There's one up in Cairngorms, a few places. They're particularly isolated, and that isolation allows for like inky darkness, no light pollution, but it also allows an incredible view of the skies whenever the clouds would roll back.

[ 25 : 26 ] I had my own tiny dark sky park back when I was younger. One of the houses that we lived in, Sky, had a gap of probably about, not quite two meters between the house and the shed.

And when I went home in winter, one of my favorite things to do was to stand there on a clear night and to look up, no light pollution at all, and to just see a sky full of brilliant stars. There is that reality that it's against a dark backdrop that glory shines. Do we see the beauty of Jesus shine? Do we see the glory of Jesus shine against this darkness of betrayal as Jesus here comes to do His Father's will? This maybe isn't a place that we would expect to see glory as people are saying no to Jesus, want to arrest and get rid of Him, but we see it as we recognize He is the great I Am who is worthy of worship. And there's something I think wonderful in our own lives that often, and this is God's kindness to us, we see His glory in unexpected places and at unexpected times. Some of us, I know it's been dark times in our lives that have been the occasion that have led us to reach out, that have led us to seek and to find Jesus and to find that actually Jesus has come and found us. And that seeing the glory of salvation, seeing the glory of forgiveness, well, that changes everything. It's transformed our worry into worship. Those deep problems that we were in give way to joyful praise.

And maybe we've had this experience as well, that those dark situations, those dark valleys that we go through are uniquely privileged times for us of recognizing God's protection and God's presence and God's promises becoming more real to us than ever they were before. Someone was sharing a story this week of knowing God's blessing in their illness, the blessing of learning to depend on God as Father, of being forced to slow down and be thankful for the small blessings of life. Dark situations can do that when we see the glory of our God and even hear the darkness of human sin. Because the most terrible betrayal is to betrayal is to betray the Son of God, the worst evil that ever happened was when people got together to kill Jesus. But against the darkness, the beauty of Jesus shines, and the glory of the good news shines as we understand that here is Jesus going willingly into arrest, into humiliation and suffering, and ultimately to death for us and for our salvation. And that really takes us to our last and brief point.

Why is Jesus here? The third thing we need to think about, we've thought about the garden and the glory, we need to think about the cup. So remember, Jesus has full knowledge. Jesus has total authority. Jesus could have gone anywhere other than the garden. He would later say, I could have called down legions of angels to get rid of my enemies in a moment. But instead, verse 11, he commands Peter, put your sword away. He says no to fighting. And he says yes to drinking the cup. Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?

So we understand at a human level, don't we, Peter's reaction. He wants to defend his friend. And we know, you know, how terrible a parting this is going to be. He hates the idea of Jesus' death. Especially when we understand that Peter still has a misguided view of what Messiah will be. He understands Messiah in terms of powerful, political, freedom-fighting King. He cannot see a place for suffering and death as yet he'll get it after the resurrection. And so he fights against, Jesus says no to fighting and yes to drinking the cup. This is Jesus, the great I am, the one who is with God, the one who is God, who has come to the garden on this set purpose. Humiliation, suffering, death, must come first before the glory that follows. And so he's going to drink the cup. Why the talk of the cup? That's why we read from the book of Isaiah, there's that Old Testament image of God giving to his enemies the cup of his wrath. The enemies of God invited, as it were, to drink down the judgment of

[ 30 : 29 ] God because of their sin, because of their evil. And Jesus comes to the garden to display his glory by taking the cup of judgment in our place. Because he doesn't drink that cup because of his sin, he drinks it because of the sins of his people as our loving, perfect substitute.

That he will drink from the cup of God's wrath so that that cup can pass from us. And instead, we can joyfully drink from the cup of salvation.

It's significant, I think, as John records at chapter 19, as Jesus dies, verse 28, knowing that everything had now been finished and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty. A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he'd received the drink, Jesus said, it is finished. With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Jesus will thirst on the cross. And all he'll receive is wine vinegar so that you and I can freely drink from the water of life, so that you and I can be fully and truly satisfied in him because he dies to forgive us, to reconcile us, to bring us to our God. And so John records this story, I think, with a due sense of awe. Here is the awful reality of human betrayal, of human rejection, that we cannot afford to stand to one side of this and say, I was for those guys. We too would put King Jesus on trial.

We too, by nature, would bind him so he is powerless. We too would refuse his rule over us. John records that awful reality, but he also records for us the awesome glory of Jesus our Savior, facing down betrayal, drinking down the cup of wrath, so that if we trust in him, if we turn to him in faith, there is nothing left for us to drink. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And John records this to speak to us of the awesome glory of God's story of redemption. Jesus is seen suffering, dying, and rising in a garden to remind us that he brings blessing where previously there was curse. He brings life where previously there was death. He restores relationship where the great separation had occurred. And so the cross of Christ ultimately is glorious, because beyond the ugliness of our betrayals stands the beauty of our Savior and his redeeming love. [ 33 : 47 ] Let's pray together. Lord, our God, we thank you for Jesus coming to that garden, for his revealing his glory, and for his willingness to drink from that cup.

Because by faith we understand that that changes everything for us, that it means by faith forgiveness. It means the promise of life with you now and for all eternity. It means the curse has been reversed, and now we live enjoying blessing with the promise of eternal blessing and glory still to come.

We thank you for the journey of Jesus to the cross. We pray that this journey would help us in our journeys of life and faith. And we pray even this morning that you would help those who are as yet not trusting in Jesus to consider what happened in this garden, its significance for life and for eternity, and that together we would be trusting and rejoicing in Jesus. And we pray in his name. Amen.