

## John 18:12–27

### Introduction

Last week we saw David’s greater Son, Jesus, go out of Jerusalem and cross to the other side of the brook Kidron where there was a garden, into which He entered with His disciples. When David went out of Jerusalem and crossed the brook Kidron He was fleeing. When Jesus went out of Jerusalem and crossed the brook Kidron He was going, purposefully, to meet His betrayer and those who would arrest and bind Him. John crafts His account of the betrayal to emphasize the sovereign authority of Jesus as the only one truly in control.

“Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went out [of the garden] and said to them, “Whom do you seek.” When they said they were seeking Jesus, the Nazarene, Jesus answered, “I am He” (*ego eimi*). The unexpected sight of Jesus coming out to meet them, and His unexpected questioning, and the unexpected power and authority of His self-identification so unnerved and overwhelmed those who had come to arrest Jesus that “they drew back and fell to the ground.” “Therefore [Jesus] again asked them, ‘Whom do you seek?’ And they said, ‘Jesus the Nazarene.’ Jesus answered, ‘I told you that I am He’” (*ego eimi*). Twice, Jesus identifies Himself not *only* as the one they are looking for (the Nazarene), but as the one who *is* who He says He is (the revelation of the Father; the only begotten Son of God). “I am He.” Or even more simply, “I am.”

When we hear Jesus saying this today, *we* hear Him saying: I am the one you want. I am the one who must drink this cup. I am the one you must take and hang on a cross. I am the one who must suffer and die. I am the one who reveals the Father by drinking this cup that He has given Me to drink – and that He has given *only* to Me to drink *alone*. **I** am the one you want. **I** am He.

“...if therefore [it is] Me you seek [Greek word order], let these go their way...” Jesus’ “I am He” has rendered the disciples “irrelevant.” This isn’t their hour, but His hour. Therefore, John doesn’t mention that all the disciples left Jesus and fled. John’s point isn’t the fear or the failure of the disciples, but the sovereign dismissal of Jesus. Remember what Jesus said in chapter sixteen:

- John 16:32 — “Behold, an hour is coming, and has now come, for you to be scattered, each to his own place, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.”

For the disciples to die with Jesus would be a waste of life. To stand by Jesus in His sufferings would require a faith and understanding that will only be possible later, when all their questions have been taken away. So Jesus says to those who have come to arrest Him: ““I told you that **I am He**; so if it is **Me** you seek, let **these** go their way,’ in order that the word which He spoke would be fulfilled, ‘Of those whom You have given Me, I lost not one.’” John’s point here isn’t the fear or the failure of the disciples, but the sovereign dismissal of Jesus. His point isn’t how the disciples failed Jesus, but how Jesus protected and guarded His disciples—even as He went to lay down His life for them. Jesus knows that only *He* can drink this cup, and that for the sake

of His disciples and all those that the Father has given to Him, *He* must drink this cup *alone*—though He isn't alone, because the Father is with Him.

**I. John 18:12–14** — 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 better for one man to die on behalf of the people.

Annas was high priest from AD 6 to AD 15, when the Romans deposed him. According to the Torah, however, the high priesthood was a lifelong appointment. So even though Annas had been deposed by the Romans, he still held a lot of power and influence and could still be called the high priest for as long as he lived (cf. Lk. 3:2; Acts 4:6). Josephus tells us that five of Annas' sons, in addition to his son-in-law Caiaphas, held the office of high priest at one time or another. We can understand, then, why Jesus was brought to Annas first. But in the end, the formal "trial" will have to be before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin.

John reminds us that the outcome of the *formal* "trial" had already been decided\* when he says: "Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews [at an earlier meeting of the Sanhedrin; Jn. 11:47] that it was better for one man to die on behalf of the people." The result of that earlier meeting was that "from that day on they planned together to kill [Jesus]" (Jn. 11:53).

On the one hand, John reminds us that the outcome of the formal "trial" before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin has already been decided. On the other hand, He reminds us that it's not ultimately Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin who are in control. We remember also from chapter 11 that "[Caiaphas] did not say this [about one man dying on behalf of the people] from himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn. 11:51-52). In the unfolding of the wicked and evil plan of men is nothing other than the unfolding of the saving and redeeming plan of God. It's not wicked and evil men who are in control, but God—and so also, Jesus, as He submits Himself in obedience to His Father's will. And so we're reminded, again, of Jesus' words to those who had come to arrest Him: "*I am He.*" We continue, now, in verses 15-16:

**II. John 18:15–16** — And 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.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that *Peter* was following from a distance (Mat. 26:58; Mk. Mk. 14:54; Lk. 22:54). Only in John do we learn that there was "another disciple" also following along with Peter and perhaps a little ahead (cf. Jn. 20:4, 6). I believe this disciple must have been one of the twelve who were with Jesus in the garden. I believe this disciple must have been John, the author of this Gospel (cf. Jn. 20:1-10 and the introductory message, "John, the Anonymous

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\* Matthew, Mark, and Luke all describe that formal trial (Mat. 26:57-68; Mk. 14:53-65; Lk. 22:66-71), but say nothing about Annas. John, on the other hand, will tell us that Annas sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas (Jn. 18:24), but say nothing about the "trial" itself.

Evangelist”; see also Carson and Ridderbos). So why does *John* include this detail? One commentator writes: “Certainly not just to explain how Peter managed to get past the woman at the gate. He did it, rather, to focus on the other disciple [himself] as the one before whose eyes and with whose cooperation all this took place” (Ridderbos). John inserts himself, here, to emphasize his role as an eyewitness (cf. Jn. 19:35). All of the Gospel accounts are founded, ultimately, on eyewitness testimony. And so in this case, it was John himself who entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. It was John himself who saw Peter still standing at the door outside, and who went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. And so it’s John himself who gives us his own eyewitness account of what happened next.

**III. John 18:17a** — Then the servant-girl who kept the door said to Peter, “Are you not also one of this man’s disciples?”<sup>†</sup>

From the servant-girl’s question to Peter, it would seem that John is known to her—and probably to the other bystanders—as one of Jesus’ disciples (“Are you not *also* one of this man’s disciples?”). John, apparently, doesn’t feel that he’s in any very great danger. In any case, his identity was known from the moment he walked up to the gate. John has never had anything to hide. Peter, on the other hand, is only suspected. And now he’s been asked to identify himself. That’s a very different situation than the one that John is in. Furthermore, it’s not John who drew his sword and attacked the servant of the high priest, but Peter. We know how easy it is for the words to come out of our mouth almost—but not quite—before we’re even aware that we’ve spoken them. “Are you not also one of this man’s disciples?” ...

**IV. John 18:17b** — He said, “I am not.”

We know from the other Gospels that Peter said more than this. Matthew tells us that “he denied it before them all, saying, ‘I do not know what you are talking about’” (Mat. 26:70). Mark says: “But he denied it, saying, ‘I neither know nor understand what you are talking about’” (Mk. 14:68). Luke says: “But he denied it, saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him’” (Lk. 22:57). John, who was there with Peter in the courtyard and who saw and heard everything, gives us the briefest account of all: “He said, ‘I am not.’” John also is the only one to tell us of *Jesus’* words to those who had come to arrest Him: “I am He.” Here, then, is John’s contrast between Jesus’ “I am He” (*ego eimi*) and Peter’s “I am not (*ouk eimi*)” (Ridderbos).

Peter’s denial represents the condition of all the disciples. Except for Peter and John, where was everyone else? They had all fled, each to his own home (cf. 16:32). As for John: Being already known to the high priest, he was never really put to the test as Peter was, and having never drawn his sword, he had far less to fear. Peter isn’t the scapegoat, he’s the representative. And so the lesson of Peter isn’t, “Don’t be like Peter,” but rather, “See how alone Jesus was – and how alone He had to be.” Only Jesus understood what was being accomplished. Only Jesus knew what He was doing. So when Jesus went out from the garden and said to those who had come to arrest Him, “Whom do you seek?” and when they answered, “Jesus the Nazarene,” Jesus said, “I am He.” I am the one you have come for. I am the one who must drink this cup. I am the one you

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<sup>†</sup> I will not be spending time on harmonizing John with Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Suffice it to say that any “contradictions” are only apparent (see the commentaries), and only support, in the end, the historical authenticity of the four Gospels (there is no artificial uniformity, as would be the case in a made-up story).

must take and hang on a cross. I am the one who must suffer and die. I am the one who reveals the Father by drinking this cup that He has given Me to drink. “I am He.” “...if therefore [it is] Me you seek, let these go their way...” When the servant-girl questioned Peter as to whether he was one of Jesus’ disciples, in the fear and anxiety of the moment and having just been told by Jesus to put his drawn sword back into its sheath, Peter said, “I am not.”

**V. John 18:18** — 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.

Here, again, are the recollections of an eyewitness – of someone who was there and has the scene vividly fixed in his memory. On the one hand, Peter is cold and wants to warm himself. On the other hand, Peter is hiding, and the best way to hide and avoid drawing attention is to try and blend in with everyone else.

**VI. John 18:19–21** — 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; behold, they know what I said.”

First, Jesus answers Annas’ implied accusation. Anything He has said privately to His disciples is all of a piece with what He has spoken openly to the world. He doesn’t have any separate, secret teaching.

Second, Jesus exposes Annas’ hypocrisy. Does Annas really not know *why* Jesus has been arrested? Has Jesus been arrested without any legal ground? But if Annas lacks evidence and testimony, he can go anywhere in Israel to find what he’s looking for. Why, then, has he not done so? Jesus speaks forthrightly, and there is rebuke in His words, but we shouldn’t imagine that He speaks belligerently. He’s simply speaking as the one with true authority. As the questioner becomes the questioned and the questioned becomes the questioner, we see Jesus once again as the one whose life is not taken from Him, but who has the authority to lay it down so that He may take it again (Jn. 10:17-18). In no place more than in the arrest, and trial, and sufferings, and death of Jesus do we see the majesty of His sovereign authority.

Jesus has answered Annas’ implied accusation and He’s exposed Annas’ hypocrisy; but He’s done *more* than this. “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; behold, they know what I said.” Which is as much as to say, “I am the one who *is* who I have said that I am.” And once again, in this, “I am He,” we see Jesus guarding and protecting those whom the Father has given Him and for whom He’s about to lay down His life. There’s nothing Annas can learn from His disciples (two of whom are just outside in the courtyard) that he can’t learn from the Jews who heard Him teach publicly in the synagogues and in the temple. This isn’t Peter’s or John’s hour. This isn’t their time to take the stand. This is Jesus’ hour – and His alone.

**VII. John 18:22–24** — And when He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby gave Jesus a slap in the face, saying, “Is that the way You answer the high priest?” Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?” So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

In John, this is the last word spoken between Jesus and the Jews. It’s a word that brings to a conclusion far more than just this examination before Annas. It brings to a conclusion the entire conflict that’s been building ever since chapter five (cf. Ridderbos).

“If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong.” Have I not spoken openly to the world? Are there not hundreds and thousands who can testify to what I have said? Is it not true that questioning Me now—after I’ve already been arrested—is hypocritical? I am who I have always said that I am. *Why*, then, do you strike Me?

“So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.” Annas sent Jesus bound to the one who had prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (Jn. 11:53; cf. 18:14). Why did Annas send Jesus bound to Caiaphas? Because this is the cup that the Father has given Jesus to drink. And here is a mystery: Because Jesus Himself has said to Annas in so many words, “I am He.”

The last we heard of Peter was that he was “standing and warming himself” (v. 18). Now John resumes the story, picking up where he left off.

**VIII. John 18:25a** — Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe all three of Peter’s denials consecutively one after the other. Only John *interweaves* Peter’s denials with Jesus’ testimony before Annas.<sup>‡</sup> And he does this so that by the contrast between Jesus’ “I am He” and Peter’s “I am not” we might see how alone Jesus was – and how alone He *had* to be. And so that we might see how even in Jesus’ “I am He,” He was guarding and protecting Peter and all the disciples whom the Father had given Him when they were not only the most helpless but even the most faithless. It was not they who could protect Jesus, but Jesus who must protect them. It was not they who would lay down their life for Jesus, but Jesus who lays down His life for them.

“Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself.”

**IX. John 18:25b–27** — 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,<sup>§</sup> and immediately a rooster crowed.

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<sup>‡</sup> Matthew and Mark place their account of Peter’s denials *after* Jesus’ appearance before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. Luke places his account of Peter’s denials *before* the trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin.

<sup>§</sup> Matthew relates Peter’s second denial like this: “He denied it with an oath [and said], ‘I do not know the man’” (Mat. 26:72). Mark and Luke respectively describe Peter’s third denial: “He began to curse and swear, ‘I do not know this man you are talking about’” (Mk. 14:71); “But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking

It wasn't more than twelve hours earlier that Peter had said to Jesus:

- John 13:37–38 — “Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.” Jesus answered, “Will *you* lay down *your* life for *Me*? [Implication: ‘No, I will lay down My life for you.’] Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.”

Jesus knows that only *He* can drink this cup, and that He must drink this cup *alone*—though He isn't alone, because the Father is with Him.

In Jesus' "***I am He***," we see His sovereign authority all in the service of His obedient *submission* to His Father's will ("The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?). In Jesus' "***I am He***," we see His sovereign authority all in the service of His *love* for the disciples and His *love* for us ("Of those whom You have given Me, I lost not one").

In Peter's "***I am not***," we see how desperately we all stand in need of Jesus' "***I am He***" — of the salvation that only He could accomplish, and of the protecting and guarding that only He can provide. And it's *because* we understand, now, Jesus' "***I am He***" that we can stand the test Peter was not yet able to stand—but that he did later (cf. Jn. 13:36; 21:18-19). *Because of Jesus'* "I am He," *we* can now confess Him boldly before the world without fear. *Because of Jesus'* "I am He," *we* can now proclaim to all the world that we are His. It was the *same* Peter who denied Jesus three times who wrote these words to the exiles who were scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia:

- 1 Peter 3:13–15 — Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR FEAR, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts [as the one who says, "I am He"], always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and reverence.

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about" (Lk. 22:60). John's "restraint" in this regard enables him to better highlight the contrast between Jesus and Peter and to keep the focus (in the context of this specific contrast) on Jesus.