

## 4.16.23 Sermon

# Your Perspective Matters | John 18:1-11

### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

jesus, kidron valley, god, john, judas, hear, people, sondra, disciples, elders, cornerstone, rabbit, atonement, duck, mentions, pray, goat, perspective, story, sins

### **SPEAKERS**

#### **Elder Sandra Anderson**

Good morning, as they said, I'm Sandra Anderson, an intern, and elder here at Cornerstone Christian Fellowship. And I'm excited to be here with you this morning.

I can remember when I first started the internship, one of our first assignments as a group was to participate in a preacher's forum. What that was like was we had Pastor Trace and a bunch of elders come and give us feedback and guidance on our sermons. And I realized every time I get up here that I'm still traumatized from that experience.

Because I don't think y'all realize how intimidating this elder section is going on over here. And every time I start talking, I happen to glance over at Pastor Tracy and she's like..., so I'm like, should I stop talking now or is this definitely going to be my last time. So that's why every time I say pray for me, and I hope I can come back. Because if you see me this way, it's because I'm really trying to avoid this section. I don't like this energy right here, like, so don't think if I turn this way, I'm really just trying to avoid eye contact over here.

But anyway, the preacher's forum, what happened was, there were about five of us. And we were all given the same scripture to preach. At first, I was like, this is

crazy, who wants to hear the same message five times back to back? But I'm an intern, I knew nothing. So, I'm like, okay, if that's what they want to hear, we're gonna do it. They would always ask, who wants to go first? And I'm like, not me. I'd be like, you go first, my elders, because I'm from the south, so I respect my elders. And so out of hospitality, I'm like, you must go first, it's only fair.

But then I didn't want to be in the middle because if you're in the middle, it means that once they got up, they'd see everything that I wrote down. I'm like, wait a minute, if you keep talking, I won't have anything left to say. And please don't let Kevin get up before you, if you've heard Kevin, he's so detailed and connects the Old Testament with the New Testament and everything. I'm like, I think I maybe got the wrong scripture, because what he's getting is definitely not what I wrote down. So being in the middle isn't always what it's cracked up to be. But at the end of the day, the interesting thing was, all five of us brought our own different perspectives.

That same scripture was mind-blowing because everyone brought their different personalities, biases, opinions, and experiences with God and life. So that same thing that sounded stupid to me at the beginning was like, wow, this is what they want to see, the different voices. And that's what I like at Cornerstone, you're not going to get the same preacher every week, you're going to hear different perspectives. So that's why I invite you guys into my perspective today. So, you can see the same scripture, and hopefully, you see it in a different perspective from me.

Just a recap, before we went to the Easter sermons, we had three sermons on John 17. And that was pretty much Jesus' Prayer. To sum it up, Jesus prayed to be glorified, he prayed for his disciples, and He prayed for us, the believers, that we would be one with the Father and for unity. And today, my verses are John 18, verses one through 11, and I'll be reading from the New Living Translation. It'll be up there if you want to follow along. When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples across 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're looking for me, 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?" The reading of the word.

Have you ever heard the quote by Robert Evans, "There are three sides to every story. There's your side, my side, and then there's the truth. And no one is lying; memories shared serve each differently." In case you didn't know, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all write about this same account of Jesus' arrest. So, we get to hear four sides to this story. And the truth is somewhere in it, but remember, no one is lying; it's their truth, their reality, their perspective.

When I first looked at this text, I liked crime TV, so I put on my Detective Anderson mode. I got all four accounts and started comparing them as if I was a detective, trying to figure out who said what and when they saw it. Then I realized some stuff wasn't there. There were some things that John said that the others didn't say, and I'm like, who's right? Where's the truth in this?

The thing about it is there are some parts, for instance, where Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention that Jesus was praying, and he was like, "Father, if you're willing, let this cup pass from me. Not my will, but yours be done." They say that Jesus was in anguish, praying so hard he was sweating, like blood falling down. They paint this picture that Jesus was really going through it. But John, on the other hand, what I just read, he mentions nothing about Jesus being in distress. He mentions a Jesus who knows what he's about to do and is ready to do it.

Another thing I feel that John purposely left out was that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all talk about the disciples falling asleep. They were like, straight up, and they were like, Mark in particular, I call him "Missing Mark," because he pointed out specifically that it was Peter, James, and John. Jesus called them a little further and was like, "Hey, pray and watch." So, I feel like John at this time is like, "No, I'm not writing about that. Like, I'm not about to write that Jesus called me to come and pray, and while he was looking for me to pray, I was snoring." I think that's why, in my opinion, John decided he wasn't going to add that for now.

Can you imagine that? Like, imagine Pastor Tracy really going through it, and she's like, "Hey, elders, I want y'all to get together and pray for me." And she's fervently praying, stressed out, and she turns around and Miss Cindy is looking over, and Val Jean is snoring. I'm like, she's like, the disciples were real. Sometimes I wonder if Jesus ever looked up and was like, "Really, this is the best of the best?" That's just me; that's how I perceive these stories.

So, Jesus is at this moment, and it's said that he didn't wake them up not once, not twice, but three times. And the third time, he was like, "Just forget it. Come on, Judas is already here. You're useless. Just forget it."

In verse one, John mentioned the Kidron Valley, and no one else mentions this. What's so important about this valley that John actually mentions it? In my detective mode, I feel like John is a good eyewitness because he notices things that other people don't notice. For example, if John was walking by and there was gum on your shoe, he would be like, "Hey, Sondra, there's gum on your shoe." It makes you think, is it really just gum, or does the gum have a deeper meaning?

The good thing about witnesses and why we get to hear four different stories is that there may be something you say that I miss or I give a different detail. That one detail can make everything clearer for you. So, I can tell you the same story and you're like, "Yeah," then Pastor Tracy comes and tells you the same story, and you're like, "Oh, that's so profound." And you're like, "I just told you the same thing." Maybe by the time we got to John, we were like, "Oh, yeah, we get it."

That's what Cornerstone is doing: going through John, not the rest of the Gospels.

So, let me tell you why I really think John mentions the Kidron Valley. The first point is this: the Kidron Valley was known to be a valley of decision and judgment. Definitely, Jesus had a decision to make. The valley was dark and stained with blood from the slain lambs from each year's Passover. So, the Kidron Valley was right by the temple. When they cleaned the temple and pushed the water through, all the blood and water went down into this valley, so the valley is just stained with blood. It's like a graveyard. It's a dark, gloomy place, and I think this is the valley of the shadow of death that David wrote about in Psalms 23. But this is just my opinion because it's definitely a gloomy type of valley.

The second point is this: it was recorded at least three times in the Old Testament where kings cleaned the temple, removing the altars and idols that the people were worshipping other gods. And when the kings cleaned the temples of all these idols and altars, they were smashed and burned in the Kidron Valley.

Do you remember when King Jesus came and cleaned the temple? I always have this image of him tossing the tables, and I'm like, why is it when I do that, people get an attitude, and I'm like, I'm just following Jesus?

Seriously, I've never tossed anything around like that, but I haven't gone to the extent that Jesus did, tossing tables. I just wonder why people are so hard on me when Jesus did the same thing.

Jesus is the only king who can really clean the temple once and for all. There's not enough space in the Kidron Valley that can hold all the idols that we still worship today. We still have a problem with worshipping creation rather than the Creator. So, when Jesus crosses the Kidron Valley over these dead idols, it is known to have been symbolic of Jesus being the true living, everlasting God. Everything that we love and adore will someday pass away. And just like these dead idols that were smashed and burned, Jesus is the only true living God.

The third thing I want to point out about the Kidron Valley is this. In the Book of Leviticus, God gives instructions for the Day of Atonement. This is a yearly ceremony that symbolizes how Jesus would atone for the sins of the people as a nation. God instructed Aaron about a scapegoat that was needed as part of the atonement. Aaron was to place both hands on the head of the live goat and confess all the wickedness and rebellion of all the sins on the goat's head. He then was supposed to send the goat into the wilderness, where the sins would be released, never to return again.

The scapegoat symbolizes that through the atonement, all their sins will be forgiven, never to return again. Now, doesn't that sound like the true goat? Not the animal, I'm talking about the greatest of all time, Jesus, because that's exactly what Jesus did. He took on the sins of the world and took them across this Kidron Valley and never to return again. That's why John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." I really thought he would have said the "holy scapegoat" because that's what it was. But tomato, tomato, it's neither here nor there.

So how does this connect with the Kidron Valley? During the Second Temple period, a two-tiered bridge spanned the Kidron Valley from the temple mount to the Mount of Olives. Across that bridge on the Day of Atonement, each year walked a goat symbolically bearing the sins of the people. The scapegoat each year, representing Christ, walked that same bridge that now Jesus is walking. After he walks through the Kidron Valley, no more scapegoats are needed, for he took the sins upon himself and took them to the cross, never to return again. Verse two: "Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place because Jesus had often met there with His disciples." How many of you are creatures of habit? How many of you, if somebody knows you, know that they could find you right here at Cornerstone, right now? Raise your hand.

Okay, keep your hands up. I want y'all to look around at these people. Because I want y'all to do me a favor. Everybody got their hands up. Don't come in next week. I want y'all to join us online. Because just like Judas, I don't want any of

your adversaries coming through these doors looking for y'all. Because we ain't got no Peters in here that's gonna defend y'all. You know, so I'm just kidding. Y'all can come back. Please come back next week. There may be David and Tony in the back, and I know they will defend you because I don't feel safe when they're back there. Every time I come through, I'm like, "Yeah, David is in his position. Tony is back there, like we're safe." So, they even told me that would never happen to y'all. So y'all come back next week. But watch the ever series, you know, because of friends.

Seriously, Judas thought that he had the upper hand. He knew the disciples' capabilities. He knew where they were, and he knew if they had weapons. So, Judas came with about 300 to 600 men, and most of them were skilled, trained warriors, ready for war. But this was no surprise to Jesus. He wasn't trying to get away; Jesus was pretty much at the forefront, like, "Who are you looking for?" So, it's not like Jesus was trying to escape this moment. Like Jesus was well aware. He wasn't caught by surprise. He said, "Hey, who are you looking for?" That doesn't sound like somebody who is afraid or trying to hide, does it?

Have you ever had a disagreement with somebody and heard the phrase, "You know where to find me?" Anybody heard that? I feel like that's what Jesus was saying to Judas when he left the Lord's Supper. He was like, "What you got to do? Go do it quickly." In my phrasing, he was like, "Yeah, go ahead and do what you got to do. You know where to find me." And people who know that phrase know not to go find those people, right?

Anybody ever tells you, "You know where to find me," like, don't literally go looking for them; they're about their life. And if you don't know about their life, man, you see me at the church; that might explain what their life is.

So, in verse 46, Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and said, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. The interesting thing is this: that word "he" really isn't there. The translators added it in for a better read. What Jesus really said is "I am," which immediately claims his divinity. The "I Am" statement carries a sense of absoluteness. God

identifies himself as the eternal God, and every religious person at that time knew that. The only other time they heard "I am" is when Moses asked, "Who shall I say sent me?" and God said, "I am." So, everybody knew that if you're saying that, you're professing to be God.

Jesus was like, "Let me stir this pot," because they fell down, and he was like, "Oh, no, get up. Let me remind you, this is who I am." And he was like, "Come on, get the show on the road. This is Passover here. I'm on a timeline; it's time for me to die. Let's get it over with."

This is my translation. You're not going to find it in the New Living Translation; this is my version. And when they fall down, to me, it's like they are in the presence of God, and everybody, you know, when you read back in the Old Testament, you read about different people like Moses who, in the presence of God, fall down. Like Isaiah, he says, "I become undone." That's why I feel like they fall down; it's not like Jesus did some magic. When he says, "I am," he revealed his glory, and all you can do in the presence of God is fall down and worship Him.

So, Jesus then was like, I said, he was like, hey, I know y'all are down, but come on, get up, come do what you came here for. I feel like they were distracted a little bit and Jesus was like, come on, get up. So, verses eight through 11, and I'm going to sum it up, is this: Jesus was being a good shepherd. A good shepherd won't let any harm come to his sheep.

Jesus said, if I needed it, I could call down legions of angels to come defend me. He didn't need Peter, like, for real. He was like, if I was just like Peter, come on out. He brought like three to six hundred men, like, Peter was less than 12. What are you doing? Just stop.

But if you can remember, back in the Old Testament in Second Kings, one angel killed 185,000 soldiers. So, Jesus, he can defend himself just like the song earlier. It may look like you're surrounded, but you're surrounded by Him. He's like, I don't need you to fight my battles. This is how you fight the battles, like what the song said, through worship and realizing that God is there. He's with



you through the situation. So, you don't need to come trying to fight no battle for God or yourself because He's there, in all His divinity, all His awesomeness, even when the opposition is against you.

So, should we not drink the cup that the Father has given us? We all have cups. And yes, sometimes we're like Jesus in the garden, saying, "Father, if it be your will, let this cup pass from me." But we have to remember that no matter what the opposition looks like, God is with us. He's for us, and He's not against us.

I want us to take a look at this photo. What do you see? I hear a bird, a duck, a rabbit. Who sees a dog? Who sees a rabbit? Who sees both? Anybody confused on the duck or the rabbit? The rabbit is this way, the duck is this way with his beak that way, just in case anybody's confused.

What I found interesting about this is that once you see both, it's kind of hard to separate them back to just being a rabbit or just a dog. And sometimes, that's how religion is. We want to focus on, it's just a duck. So, when somebody comes and says, no, I see a rabbit, it's like, no, you're against me. We need to separate because you're not seeing things as I see them. We like to say no, I saw a duck, and that's the only way it can be. This is how I kind of got confused because I looked at passive traits. And I told you, I made a bad mistake, and she was like, she's like, mid-sentence again, like that energy is powerful, like, thanks, wow, sad.

But that's how it is. We always want people to see how we see things instead of the invitation of, hey, you saw a rabbit, I saw a duck. Can you see my perspective to say maybe it's both? And how do you see God? How do you see life? Do we just see God as a rabbit? Or just as a duck? Or can it be both? And have we been fooled just to say, hey, this is all I learned from my own theology and how I was brought up, like coming in a senator said, it's like, hey, the box, hey, this is just a duck. This is how we do it. If somebody tells you it's a rabbit, they lie. And this is all that it is. Centered-set said it's like, no, it can be a duck, it can be a rabbit, it can be both and or it can be more. It could be, what else do we see? That's the center set, that's focusing on Jesus, like, hey, it could be more than what we just see. It could be, hey, somebody's like, oh, it's just a bunch of

lies. If that's what you see, that's what you say. That's your truth, your perspective.

So, we have to invite different perspectives, just like Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It's not John saying, oh, well, they already wrote it, so there's no sense for me to write it. No, it's your story. Write it anyway. Say it anyway. Because what I say may be the very thing that you need that you can't get from Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The only negative feedback that I ever got as an intern was this: And every time I get in trouble with Pastor Tracy, the only thing that she tells me is, "Saundra, why aren't you using your voice?" And I recently had a conversation with her yesterday on why she looks so confused. It's because I'm not speaking. You have something to say, but you're choosing not to, because I used to think I don't have a voice.

Everybody was telling me, just like this song, you should be ashamed, you're not worthy. When I came into the internship, I'm like a doctor, you got elders who have been here for years on years, years of knowledge and understanding, like, who am I? That they're going to listen to me or say that, oh, Saundra's opinion matters? Like, who are you to come tell the congregation anything about Jesus? And the amazing thing is, when other people said no, God said yes.

So, it's the importance of your testimony. What story do you have to tell? Every time I walk out of here and somebody says, "Hey Saundra, when are you preaching again?" Just that word inspires me to say, guess what? Because you're speaking, you're using your voice. Because if you don't speak it, you don't know what I need in order to feel accepted or to feel like my voice matters.

So, every time you feel the need to say something or do something for somebody, do it, say it, use your voice. It's not just about being up here preaching and teaching. It's like Miss Cindy, she's not up here teaching and preaching, but how many people does she impact? I call her mayor because there's almost not a person I know that doesn't know Miss Cindy. But she's not up here preaching. She's using her voice.

Everybody has a voice, and you've got a story to tell. Don't worry about who doesn't agree with you or who doesn't approve of you. They said it first, or it's a story that's already been written, who cares? Be like John and say, "I don't care. Maybe they missed out on some details, and I have a different background. I have a different bias. I have a different perspective that even though you may think it's the same story, I have something to add." Or, I can hear from you that, "Hey, you can say the same thing, but I'm going to say the same exact thing, and because it's coming from me and somebody can identify with my skin complexion or my sexuality or whatever, they'll find something to connect with and say, 'I receive it from you.'"

So, be who God has called you to be. Speak what God has called you to speak. Your perspective matters. Amen.