

## Session 6: John 18:1–40

### **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

#### **Main Idea**

As Christians, we belong to Jesus’s kingdom and look to him as our final authority in all matters of truth and wisdom.

#### **Head Change**

To know that the goal of Jesus’s ministry is to redeem sinners and bring the kingdom of heaven to earth.

#### **Heart Change**

To feel humbled before Jesus, submitting to his commands and authority.

#### **Life Change**

To apply God’s truth, found in his Word, to our daily decisions.

## **OPEN**

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### **How do you think our lives would be different if we had a king instead of a president?**

Our experience is far separated from the monarchies and kingdoms of old. Our leaders come and go by the will of the people. As a result, we have no problem criticizing our politicians. But monarchs were (and still are) born into their role—preference and cultural mood had nothing to do with their ascension. They ruled absolutely and demanded their subjects' loyalty.

In today's session, Jesus we will learn about Jesus's kingdom. Like a king, he demands our attention and obedience. But his kingdom is uniquely different from the ones we are familiar with. The kingdom of God is one that we all would want to join.

## **READ**

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John 18:1–40. If you are short on time, read verses 1–11, 16–18, 25–27, 33–38.

## **WATCH**

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Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What is our proper response to acknowledging Jesus as king?**

**What is the foundation of God's kingdom?**

Show Session 6: *John 18:1–40* (13 minutes).

## **DISCUSS**

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After dinner, Jesus and his disciples went to an orchard. From other gospel accounts, we know this was the Garden of Gethsemane. There, he was betrayed by Judas. Read John 18:1–11.

Jesus knew Judas’s heart was set against him, and he still walked into Judas’s trap in obedience to the Father. **What does Jesus’s willingness to endure betrayal reveal about his character? About his love for you?**

Jesus willingly accepted betrayal, arrest, and his future execution in order to fulfill the Father’s purposes for him. **When you are faced with a difficult decision, how does the potential for difficulty influence your decisions? What do you think it looks like for us to trust God in our difficult circumstances?**

When the soldiers recognized who they had come to arrest, they fell to the ground in shock. Dr. Evans noted that their amazement is the natural reaction to meeting Jesus. **When we encounter God, we cannot help but fall to our knees. When you first met Jesus, what was your response?**

Peter lashed out, striking a servant of the high priest. His fear and aggression revealed how little he understood Jesus’s mission. Peter was intent on keeping Jesus safe, but Jesus was determined to save the world through his death. **In what ways is Peter’s reaction understandable? What can we do to remind ourselves to trust God when we want to act like Peter—impulsively with more passion than thought?**

After Jesus’s arrest, John’s account will bounce between the events inside of the courtroom where Jesus is being tried and outside, where Peter begins to deny having met Jesus. Read John 18:12–18.

Peter and “another disciple” followed Jesus as he was taken in front of Annas, stopping by a fire to warm themselves. There, Peter denied being a disciple of Jesus, a sharp contrast with his previous boasting that he would be willing to die for Jesus (John 13:37). **In what ways can you relate with Peter’s fear? When you have been challenged about your faith, how do you respond?**

**Note:** Scholars believe the unnamed disciple who accompanied Peter was John, the author of this Gospel account. To learn more about John, also known as “the beloved apostle,” go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

While Peter was denying Jesus outside, Jesus was being questioned by the High Priest. Read John 18:19–24.

Jesus did not back down from the religious leaders’ abuse but stood serenely confident through his questioning. While Peter denied the truth to save himself, Jesus was being beaten for speaking honestly. **In today’s world, how can speaking the truth get us into trouble? To what degree are you willing to get mocked or rejected for speaking the truth?**

Dr. Evans said that truth was God’s key to unlock his plan in the world. **How did defending the truth before Annas move Jesus’s plan forward?**

The story cuts from Jesus’s trials with Annas and Caiaphas back outside to Peter. Read John 18:25–27.

Peter continued to buckle under pressure from young women and slaves, people with little to no authority in their society. After Peter denied Jesus a third time, a rooster crowed, just as Jesus had predicted. While John doesn’t show us Peter’s reaction, Luke 22:61–62 tells us that Peter left the courtyard and wept bitterly. His shame was overwhelming. **When is it easy for us to deny Jesus? How much pressure does it take for us to consider denying Jesus?**

**How do you react to spiritual failure?**

The High Priests wanted Jesus dead, but the Romans controlled their land and only the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, could hand down a death sentence. Read John 18:28–40.

When asked, Jesus did not deny being a king, but he clearly described his kingdom as “not of this world” (v. 36). Dr. Evans explained that Jesus meant his kingdom was not sourced from the world—it originated with God. Jesus’s first and foremost allegiance was to God and his plans, not the politics of humans. **What can Jesus’s answer teach us about the relationship between his church and worldly institutions today? Which “kingdom”**

**have you found yourself supporting more often—the kingdom of God or the political situation in which you live?**

**Note:** *To learn more about Pilate and the Roman governance over Israel, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

Echoing his statement that his kingdom was not “of this world,” Jesus then said that those who are “of the truth” (18:37) listen to his voice—the source of truth. Those who embrace Jesus as king also align their lives with his Word.

**What does it look like for you to listen to Jesus’s voice?**

Jesus was betrayed by a friend, arrested on false charges, convicted in a sham trial, and rejected in favor of Barabbas, a criminal. He endured all this so that we might be accepted by God, freed from sin, and made members of God’s kingdom. God may also call us into difficult circumstances to build his kingdom. **What difficult circumstances has God called you into? What would it look like for you to serve God during these circumstances?**

## **LAST WORD**

Jesus’s kingdom is not of this earth, but he is intent on bringing it to the earth. He is our king; as his followers, we must submit our lives to his will, his Word, and his wisdom. The more we do, the more of his presence we can experience in this life.

But what if God calls us into a difficult situation? What if our circumstances are in chaos? What if our friends have abandoned us? Be at peace, your king has experienced all of these things and is with you. He has not forgotten you. In fact, your struggle may be the means of his kingdom being built on earth.

## **GO DEEPER**

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

### **1. Who is the unnamed apostle?**

Throughout the Gospel of John, the author refers to one of the apostles by various vague descriptions— “the other disciple” or “the one Jesus loved”—but never by name. Many scholars believe this unnamed apostle is the author, John the apostle, son of Zebedee.

John enjoyed a close relationship with Jesus: he was part of Jesus's inner circle, along with his brothers, James and Peter, and was present at important events like Jesus's transfiguration (Mark 9:2) and his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37).

John often wrote himself into his Gospel. Read John 13:23; 19:26–27; 20:8. **What do these passages teach you about John's relationship with Jesus? In what way do their interactions deepen your understanding about Jesus's love for his friends?**

Another aid to finding the apostle John in the Gospels and Acts is his partnership with Peter. They sometimes worked together, whether procuring a room for the Passover (Luke 22:8), dramatically healing a lame man (Acts 3:1–10), or encouraging new believers (Acts 8:14–17). Peter's interactions with John support the idea that the unnamed disciple who often partnered with him was the same person, John the son of Zebedee.

Read John 13:23–25; 18:15; 20:4; 21:7. **What do you learn about John from the events he and Peter experienced? How would you describe his friendship with Peter?**

Read John 21:20–24. **What does the author want his readers to know after they've read his account of Jesus's life?**

John and Jesus shared a strong relationship. As his leader, Jesus addressed John's missteps, even speaking sharply to correct his wrong thinking. As friends, they shared a deep connection, loyalty, and grief. Through their relationship, Jesus's humanity shines brightly. **Do you think of Jesus as a relatable person who could be a close friend?**

**What can you learn from John that could help you have a deeper relationship with Jesus?**

## **2. Pilate and Roman Rule in Judea**

Throughout the Gospels, the people of Judea were under Roman occupation. **But why were the Romans in Israel at all?**

In 63 BC, the Romans expanded their ever-growing empire across the Mediterranean and swallowed up Judea. Jewish kings like Herod (Luke 3:1) submitted to Roman rule and his allowed to remain "kings" with limited influence. The true authority in Judea was the governor, men like Pontius Pilate, a Roman prefect tasked with maintaining order in the Jewish territory.

The Jewish historian Josephus described Pilate as an authoritarian leader who did not respect the Jews' religious traditions. His tone-deaf decisions, like hanging pictures of the Emperor throughout Jerusalem and minting coins with pagan symbols on them, provoked riots and led to the rise of a revolutionary group called zealots—men who used guerilla warfare and terror as weapons against Rome. Eventually, Pilate relented from provoking the Jews, but maintained an uneasy relationship with the Jewish authorities. But Judea was a tinderbox, ready to explode into violence. **How would you react if you were living under occupation like the Jews of this time?**

Now that you have an idea of the political climate in Judea, consider some of Jesus's disciples: Matthew worked for Rome as a tax collector and Simon was a zealot. The only place that enemies came together in Judea was under the banner of Christ. **What do the diversity of political viewpoints in the twelve disciples teach us about forgiveness and tolerance in the church?**

While the Pharisees and Sadducees held some authority in Judea, only the Roman governor could hand down a death penalty to a criminal. Pilate was politically vulnerable—he needed to maintain peace in Judea and could not allow a purported “king of the Jews” to remain free. But Jesus, in Pilate’s view, an innocent man. Pilate’s loyalty to Caesar and his own political future led him to condemn Jesus despite the injustice of the conviction (Luke 23:12; Acts 4:27). **In what ways do the political backdrop of the Gospels help you understand the story more clearly?**

The Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah, their promised king whom God had said would redeem them. The oppression of Rome weighed heavy on their lives, and they assumed the Messiah would lead a revolution that would bring them political freedom. So, when Jesus appeared preaching “the kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:15), they thought he meant a new Jewish kingdom on earth. But Jesus had come to bring something even greater—a heavenly kingdom and spiritual freedom. **In what ways can we confuse Jesus’s purposes today? What do you think it looks like to prioritize Christ in our politically free system?**