

Christ's Trial, Denial, and Faithfulness All the While (John 18:12-27)

Please turn to John chapter 18 and we'll be looking at v. 12-27 but before I read that text, I want to set the context of v. 1-11 with the words of a hymn tracing the steps of Jesus to Gethsemane at the foot of the Mt of Olives:

'Tis midnight; and on Olive's brow, The star is dimmed that lately shone:

'Tis midnight in the garden now, The suffering Saviour prays alone.

'Tis midnight; and from all removed, The Saviour wrestles lone with fears:
E'en that disciple whom He loved, Heeds not his Master's grief and tears.

'Tis midnight; and for other's guilt, The Man of Sorrows weeps in blood;
Yet He Who hath in anguish knelt, Is not forsaken by His God.

'Tis midnight; and with traitor's kiss, Betrayed is now the Lord of Bliss:
He now is led to grief and pain, To earn for me eternal gain.¹

18:12 *So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.* ¹³ *First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.* ¹⁴ *It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.* ¹⁵ *Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest,* ¹⁶ *but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in.* ¹⁷ *The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."* ¹⁸ *Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.* ¹⁹ *The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.* ²⁰ *Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.* ²¹ *Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said."* ²² *When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?"* ²³ *Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?"* ²⁴ *Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.*

We'll come back to the rest later, but here we see Christ's trial by leaders, denial by Peter, and all the while, faithfulness by the Savior, our true Leader

Let's start where it starts: **Christ's Trial by the Jewish Leaders**

In v. 12 consider the ironies. This is the Lord of hosts, the Lord of armies in heaven, that a small earthly army is bringing. There's a Roman captain over soldiers here escorting Jesus, the true '*captain of their salvation*' (Heb 2:10 NKJV). The Savior who loosed the bonds of spiritual captives (Lk 13:16) is now in bonds at the end of v. 12. This Deliverer promised freedom to those bound by slavery to sin (Jn 8:31-36); now sinful men have bound Him like a slave. Jesus the 'Leader' of Acts 5:31 is being led by Jewish officers in v. 13 to face Israel's supposed leaders. The Judge of all the earth is now about to stand on trial before earthly judges. The Lord of life is about to lose His life. Israel's high priest here encounters the true '*great High Priest*' of Heb 4:14. Jn 18:14 says the sinful high priest Caiaphas '*had advised the Jews that it would be expedient [or good] that one man should die for the people.*'

That's a quote from Jn 11 where Israel's religious leaders met to discuss the rising popularity of Jesus after He raised Lazarus. Some feared Rome might take away their nation if the followers of Jesus became too big but Caiaphas said basically better for Him to go than us: "*it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.*" *He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad*' (11:50-52). Then right after that it said Caiaphas and the leaders planned to kill Jesus.

Caiaphas meant better *for Jesus to die then for us to be destroyed*, better for *1 man to be a fall guy scapegoat*. But God meant more than Caiaphas did: Jesus did take a fall for and was scapegoat and sacrificial lamb for sinners, so whosoever believes shall not perish. This same John uses this language in 1 Jn 2:2: *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*. Not just for us, Jews only, but also a world of Gentiles. It's not universal redemption, but like v. 52 for all the children of God all around the world, all believers He gathers as 1 redeemed people. Caiaphas unwittingly prophesied substitutionary atonement for sin like his.

It says in 18:13 Caiaphas was high priest that year, Annas was his father-in-law, but notice v. 18 says '*The high priest questioned Jesus.*' then after the questioning in v. 24 it says Annas sent Jesus to '*Caiaphas the high priest.*' Why does it say the high priest questioned Jesus then sent Jesus to the high priest? Is Annas or Caiaphas the high priest? Yes! (Lk 3:2) Annas was high priest *emeritus*, he still had the title, like Pastor Dale or past U.S. presidents.

They're still called President, they keep the title and still have influence but aren't the sitting president in office. Annas in v. 19 tries to use his influence but ultimately by v. 24 he has to send Him to the official sitting high priest.

A 1st century Jew 'Josephus indicates that it was customary for former high priests to continue to be called by that term...The [Annas/Caiaphas] family is mentioned several times in later Jewish writings...noted for its...wealth and power...but also for its greed.'² The ancient Jewish 'Talmud declares: "Woe to the family of Annas! Woe to the serpent-like hisses" (probably the whisperings of Annas and...his family, seeking to bribe and influence...)'³

The high priesthood oversaw lucrative concessions business in Jerusalem. Don't think concessions like popcorn and peanuts and cracker jacks, think oxen and sheep with prices jacked. These were vendors for the temple, not a team. But what might be expected in the coliseum of Rome for the gladiator games had come into the corruption of religion for God's people. They were way over-pricing needed animals to out-of-town travelers who had no other choice, and they required Roman currency be changed to Jewish coins to do temple business with exorbitant exchange rates. It was a big business and it profited the high priest family who lived in a palace overlooking the temple.

Annas was father, in-law, or grandfather to 6 or more high priests, including Caiaphas, he's like the godfather, in with the priests but not above mob hits. Why would his Jewish mafia put a hit on Jesus, like they had since chapter 7? Chapter 2 tells us Jesus shut down their corrupt temple business 3 years earlier, like a massive sting He cleaned house, exposing Caiaphas' house of thieves, a den of robbers. On the road to the temple literal highway robbery was happening, till Jesus turned the tables on the organized crime running it

Then Jn 12 Palm Sunday days earlier Jn 18 He again drove corrupt business out of the temple, with thousands of people joining His "Occupy Jerusalem Movement." He drove everyone out and took over the place, shutting down and shutting up the chief priests under the high priest on their home court, then each day that week He did the same with the Jewish scribes, then the Jewish elders, then the Pharisees, then the Herodians, then the Sadducees, then the Rabbis (Mt 21-23). He showed the bankruptcy of corrupt religion, and the corrupt religious leaders feared the bankruptcy of their corrupt jobs. He had just killed business for Annas and Caiaphas so they want Him killed. In Mt 26 they made the plans '*in the palace of the high priest ... Caiaphas and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him*' (v. 3-4)

Earlier they thought they'd wait to try till Passover was over, now they feel if they wait it will all be over for them. So they arrest Him by stealth, bring Him back to the palace, but they need grounds to kill Him, so Jn 18:19 says *'The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.'* This is before v. 24 when He's brought before Caiaphas, the high priest who could legally try Jesus and bring the case to the Romans. This is Annas, still a high priest in title, attempting intimidation, interrogation for incrimination

²⁰ *Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret."* ²¹ *Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said."* Jesus isn't evading or avoiding the question, He's asking the high priest why he's asking Him⁴ questions instead of asking witnesses, which Jewish law required for trials.

What Annas does here in our law would be like trying to force a confession that wouldn't be admissible in court, or getting evidence without a warrant that would be illegal and thrown out, or denying the right to an attorney, or not allowing witnesses to be called in defense, or not reading him the right to remain silent, then illegally using what he says against him in a law court

In Jewish law, the accused wasn't expected to speak, witnesses were to be called *for* the accused first, and the high priest wasn't to speak or question witnesses or the accused. Jesus says 'why are you questioning me, where's my witnesses? You headed up the Jews' Supreme Court, you know the law'

²² *When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?"*

²³ *Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?"* Jesus didn't speak wrongly here, He's right, and defends *His* right. Annas is in the wrong, but his minion doesn't like it so he hits Jesus, another illegal action (Acts 23:3). Micah 5 prophesied a Messiah 'ruler in Israel' would come from Bethlehem but it says they'll '*strike the judge of Israel on the cheek*' (5:1). That's what just happened, striking Israel's true Judge. The false one, Annas, is now on trial before Jesus. The tables are turned on a guy who ran the temple tables! He knows it so v. 24 *Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest*

The other gospel writers tell us by this time midnight madness had gathered the Sanhedrin for a 'trial,' the religious leaders were angry and bloodthirsty.

It's probably between midnight and 2-3 am, 0-dark-30 something, and false witnesses were called, but couldn't keep their stories straight (Mk 14). OT law should have condemned these men (Dt 16:16-19). Caiaphas, who was supposed to be a silent judge in his seat, he stands up as a prosecutor asking if Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus said He was and they'll see Him at heaven's throne. *'Then the high priest tore his clothes [violating Leviticus 21:10], saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses?" ... They [the council] answered and said, "He is deserving of death"'* (Mt 26). No defense allowed, no examination of the evidence.

Boice: 'it was an established and inflexible rule that proceedings in capital cases could not be conducted at night...this restriction did not apply merely to the trial itself but also the events leading up to it, particularly the arrest... [the priests bribing Judas to bring an arrest about was forbidden by law and] ...the accused was never to be compelled to testify...The high priest wasn't allowed to express an opinion or interrogate either the witnesses or accused. Rather, he was to keep perfectly silent. When the balloting was taken, he was to vote last, for his prestige was considered so great that any opinion expressed by him might be imagined to sway the other members...Caiaphas violated all these...no court could lawfully meet on a Sabbath or other feast day nor *on a day preceding a Sabbath or a feast day* [which it was in Jn 18] ... The trial was also illegal because it was conducted *within the space of one day*...If he was found guilty [verdict legally must delay 24 hrs] while the judges reconsidered the evidence and tried to find some way by which [he] might be exonerated...Every attempt was made to secure acquittal ... in the afternoon of this second day...a second vote [in retrial must be] taken.'⁵

None of that happened with Jesus. After 'trial,' v. 28 says they immediately at sunrise took Him to Pilate for execution. It was all illegal, start to finish. One wrote: 'In the annals of jurisprudence no travesty of justice ever took place that was more shocking than this one...this is no trial...*It is murder!*'⁶ The book *The Murder of Jesus* said in the law if 'charges had been brought against the accused by council members [as Caiaphas did] the entire council was disqualified from trying the case ... [this] unjust ... kangaroo court ... [committed] the greatest miscarriage of justice in the history of the world.'⁷

What's a takeaway for us? See man's hard heart and Christ's heart of love. Caiaphas was a hard-hearted hateful unfaithful unfeeling high priest, Christ is a great High Priest whose name is love, a faithful and merciful high priest who's sympathetic because of all He went through (Heb 2:17-18, 4:14-16).

The other gospels say as Jesus stood condemned before the council they spit in His face to shame Him, blindfolded Him as they punched Him in the face and mocked Him: *if you're a prophet, who hit you?* They rudely scoffed but

Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood
Sealed my pardon with His blood; Hallelujah! What a Savior!⁸

He didn't deserve to be condemned, but we deserve to be condemned before the perfect bar of God's justice. When I'm examined by God's Law, I stand condemned, but the gospel tells me in my place condemned Jesus stood! He went all the way to cross for Gentile sinners like me and Jewish sinners like these, and despite all these hard-hearted sins, Luke 23 says Jesus showed a heart of love as He's lifted up to die, 1st thing He says: *Father, forgive them*

Guilty, vile, and helpless, we; spotless Lamb of God was He
Full atonement! – can it be? Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Even for priests, Pharisees, Sanhedrin members? Yes! One Pharisee named Nicodemus already had sought Jesus out privately in Jn 3 and in 7:52 asked the council: *'Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing?'* By Jn 19 Nicodemus has clearly become a believer along with Joseph of Arimathea, *'a respected member of the [Sanhedrin] council'* (Mk 15:43), a *'righteous man who had not consented to their decision'* (Lk 23:50-51).

And even many priests who originally opposed Jesus, Acts 6:7 says *'a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.'* In Acts 7, a Pharisee of Pharisees at another Sanhedrin trial for Stephen, could later say he did much of Jn 18's sins to Christ's followers *'to the death ... as the high priest and the whole council ... can bear me witness ... when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them ... and tried to make them blaspheme'* (22:3-5, 26:10-12). Acts 9 says *'Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to...bring them bound to Jerusalem.'* But while he's arresting them the Lord arrests him by grace, saves him and makes him a disciple! In early church tradition his rabbi Gamaliel is said to have become a Christian, too. We know for sure Paul followed Christ steps, he said, like Christ *'I am ...bound...as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!'* 2 Timothy 2:9.

[Acts ends with Paul bound but the gospel unbound, unhindered, 28:31]

Jn 18 isn't just about the sin of murdering Jesus, it's for our sin. Jesus said *"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' ...But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."* (Mt 5:21-22 NASB) Caiaphas broke laws unjustly, Scripture says we're all unjust lawbreakers.

John was outside this lawless trial and later wrote *'sin is lawlessness[but] he appeared in order to take away sins and in him there is no sin'* (1 Jn 3:4-5). Peter was waiting outside this court for the verdict, and later wrote: *'Christ ... died for sins, once for all, the just **for the unjust**, so that He might bring us to God'* (1 Pet 3:18 NASB), and *'Christ also suffered **for you**, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls'* (1 Pet 1:22-25).

That's takes us from the trial by the leaders to: **The Denial By Peter**

Peter knew first-hand about straying from the Shepherd this night. v 15 says *'Simon Peter followed Jesus and so did another disciple.[I think it's John⁹] Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, 'You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.'*

And nearby a rooster is standing up and warming up its voice. That chicken soon calls out to one acting like a chicken before a servant girl. Ps 1 says a blessed man *'walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful...They are like the chaff which the wind drives away'* (v. 1, 4 NKJV). Peter walked in a place where ungodly counsel was taking place, and before long he was standing with the sinners, doing what the sinners were doing at the fire. Matthew says he was initially walking at a distance, but soon he's actually sitting with the enemy (26:58).

[Peter later wrote *'beware lest you also fall,'* 2 Pet 3:17 NKJV]

Luke says in this Satan was tempting Peter to sift him like wheat, like chaff that wind blows away (Lk 22:31). Another takeaway is we can be taken away, too, if we walk with sinners, it's easy to stand with them, then to get comfortable and settled in sin. Matthew Henry wrote: *'Those that warm themselves with evil doers grow cold towards good people and good things, and those...fond of the devil's fireside are in danger of the devil's fire.'*¹⁰

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You also are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” ²⁶ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” ²⁷ Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

There were several steps leading up to Peter’s fall that lead to our falls, too:

1. Speaking quickly and inconsistently; Jn 13:8-9, 1 Pet 3:11, 15, 4:11
2. Pride and self-confidence; Jn 13:37, 1 Pet 5:5-9
3. Reacting by feelings and with fleshly weapons; Jn 18:10, 1 Pet 4:7
4. Walking, standing, sitting with sinners; Jn 18:15-27, Ps 1, 1 Pet 2:11-12

This isn’t the first time God used animals to rebuke sinners, like the donkey rebuking the more stubborn Balaam, or Samuel saying wipe out Amalekites and all the animals and King Saul said ‘*I have performed the commandment of the LORD.*’ And Samuel said, ‘*What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears...?*’ Saul’s lie is interrupted ‘Samuel, I killed all the sheep’-baaaaa! Peter’s lie is now interrupted by another animal. The other gospel writers say Peter denied Jesus with an oath and he swore ‘I do not know the man, I –cockadoodle-doo! And instantly he remembered Jesus told him this would happen before the cock crowed in the morning watch, and Luke says Jesus looked across the courtyard at Peter and Peter went out and he wept bitterly.

This is the end of our scripture today but it isn’t the end of the story for him. Peter’s repentance began here. I like to think as Jesus looked at Peter, there was love in His eyes. I know there was in Jn 21 when Jesus restored Peter to ministry, a 3-fold love overcame a 3-fold denial. I like to think in the future as Peter heard roosters crow, he knew ‘*the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, great is Thy faithfulness*’ (not ours, Lam 3:23). Another passage says ‘*if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself*’ (2 Tim 2:13)

[contrast Peter’s ‘I am *not*’ with the Lord’s ‘*I Am*’ in v. 6]

Through trial and denial the Lord Jesus is faithful all the while. Hallelujah! Morning by morning new mercies Peter did see and hear, each rooster crow spoke the end of darkness, another day of life dawning, a fresh reminder of the glorious morning when Jesus died for Peter’s past sin, rose for his new life and especially wanted Peter to see and hear it. The angels told the ladies ‘*go and tell his disciples and Peter*’ (Mk 16:7). Peter was told first (Jn 20:2) Peter ran to the tomb (Lk 24:12) and Peter swam to shore first to see Jesus (Jn 21). The hand that caught Peter when he fell and sank raised Peter again

No matter what you've done or how you've sinned and failed and fallen, the Lord can still raise you up and restore you and use you. Peter's Exhibit A of that: his repeated humbling failures were redeemed by God's grace, as Peter wrote to all Christians '*God...gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time ...And the God of all grace...will himself restore you*' (1 Pet 5:5-7, 10 NIV). Peter's the one who gave us the phrase '*the precious blood of Christ,*' it was so precious to him in redeeming past sins (1:18-19). Peter also gave us '*love covers a multitude of sin*' (4:8, Christ's love is good news for his and ours!)

One writes: 'even as the rooster was crowing, Jesus was still living Peter "to the end" (13:1). Our sins do not separate us from the love of Jesus; Jesus separates us from the love of our sin, and from sin's guilt and power.' Hallelujah! Jesus loved Peter during and after his sinful denials, He forgave leaders after their sinful trial, and if there was grace for them, there's grace for us! No matter what you've done, the Lord from the cross says '*Father, forgive,*' for all who trust Christ, God declares us righteous in the heavenly Supreme Court. We were unrighteous, bound in sin, condemned, but there's no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus! Why? Heaven's high priest steps down from His seat and in our place condemned He stood. He was bound so we could be set free. He's declared guilty so we can be declared righteous in Christ, because of His finished work on the cross and His continual work in heaven on high, our exalted Advocate in court pleading our case for us.

Lifted up was He to die, 'It is finished' was His cry
Now in heaven exalted high, Hallelujah! What a Savior!

¹ William B. Tappan, "Tis Midnight; and on Olive's Brow."

² Andreas Kostenberger, *John*, p. 513.

³ William Hendriksen, *John*, p. 388.

⁴ The self-evident fact that self-testimony isn't valid or sufficient for a court of law is what Jesus appealed to in John 5:31-33 with John as a witness for Him and further corroborating evidence could be found in His Father's testimony through His miracles (v. 36-37) and the Scripture was a third witness (v. 39)

⁵ James Boice, *John 18-21*, p. 1398-1401.

⁶ Hendriksen, 396.

⁷ John MacArthur, *The Murder of Jesus*, p. 105.

⁸ Phillip Bliss, "Hallelujah! What a Savior!"

⁹ The identical Greek phrase and form (*ho allos mathetes*) in 18:15 is repeated in 20:3-4, 8, clearly the '*disciple...Jesus loved*' (20:2). John may have been related to a priestly family if his mom is Salome, sister of Mary (19:25->Mk 15:40) related to Elizabeth's priestly line (Lk 1:5, 36). There's also an early Christian writing stating 'John used to supply fish to the court of the high priest while still working for his father, Zebedee' (Kostenberger, p. 513).

¹⁰ Boice, p. 1412.