

Jesus' Unjust Trial, Peter's Shameful Denial

Scripture: John 18:12–27

Code: 43-102

I want you to open your Bible now to the 18th chapter of the gospel of John to return to the drama that is unfolding with our Lord on the day of His execution – the day of the murder, the crucifixion. We find ourselves in chapter 18 and verse 12, and we're going to look through a rather prolonged portion of Scripture, at least compared to what we normally cover, from verse 12 down through verse 27. We can actually cover that amount of text because it is a straightforward and direct narrative. And while we could feed in the additional insights and revelation that come from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, I'm not going to do that here. I don't want to expand this text. I want to give it to you the way the Lord has designed it, because it is a somewhat unusual format.

In this text we have Jesus' trial and Peter's denial juxtaposed against each other, and the writer John goes back-and-forth from the trial to the denial – back to the trial, back to the denial. They are two significant events, monumental events, happening at exactly the same time. And so he turns the lens for awhile on the trial and awhile on the denial, and we see Jesus in His glory and Peter in His iniquity. It is a very stark text, stark because the glory of Christ, as always, shines; and that's John's intention. But it shines against the backdrop of the utter failure of his most noble vociferous and verbally committed and self-confident follower Peter. In fact, it shows us the very kind of sin for which our Lord is headed to the cross.

Peter is sinning in an almost rapid fire and intentional way at the same time our Lord is preparing to go to the cross to pay the price Himself for Peter's iniquity. Peter's denials are terrible on every level. They are acts of disloyalty, and cowardice, and pride, and fear. And as ugly as they are, the punishment for all of these denials is about to be born by Jesus within a matter of a few hours. So in the darkness grace shines, because this is just the kind of sin, sin at its worst, among those who belong to the Lord, whose penalty our Lord Himself paid.

Now, we know where we are; this is John 18. We have been involved with the drama of the unfolding of Passion Week since way back early in the gospel of John about halfway through. In chapter 12, verse 23, Jesus said His hour had come, and He said that upon entering the city of Jerusalem – or around that time – at the beginning of Passion Week. Then on Thursday night, He gathered with His disciples in the upper room to celebrate the Passover, and He essentially declared again, "My hour has come." And that's how John introduces that evening, knowing that His hour had come, chapter 13, verse 1.

From chapter 13 through 17, that night is revealed to us. Our Lord's teaching the establishment of the Lord's Table. The celebration of the Passover is turned into the Communion service; instruction is given in the upper room. Then they leave the upper room; they walk through the city of Jerusalem in the darkness of the late night Thursday. They walk all the way into Friday morning; our Lord is still teaching, then He stops and prays the prayer of John 17.

He is now done with the teaching and the praying, and we find Him in chapter 18 moving directly into

the point of His arrest. He's not running; He's not fleeing; He is going right at it. Chapter 18, verse 4 says, "Knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, Jesus went forth." He went right into the place where He knew they would be, and that would be the garden of Gethsemane where He would go very often. In fact, every night that week at the end of a long day in the temple, He would go to that very garden for rest. Judas knew He would be there, and Jesus knew Judas knew He would be there, and so Jesus knew that Judas would lead the force that would come to arrest Him; that was the place.

On the way into the garden of Gethsemane, before maybe a thousand people in that great, large group arrived to arrest Him, our Lord prays the familiar plea to the Father: "If there's any way for this cup to pass from Me, let it be; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done," and He agonizes over what's coming and sweats as it were great drops of blood; not because He dreaded the physical suffering, but because He dreaded the sin-bearing. And if He, being the Son of God, didn't dread that, we would question His deity.

All of that is now in the past. The disciples have been with Him all evening. Judas left early from the upper room; the eleven have been with Him through the evening, through the prayer. Into the garden He took Peter, James, and John. They were supposed to pray; they fell asleep; our Lord prayed. Now they're all gathered together. They go into the very place where Jesus will be confronted by this entourage and arrested.

When they show up, in the beginning of chapter 18, there are Roman soldiers, there is a cohort that could number as many as six-hundred. There are temple police that could number as many as two-hundred. There are scribes and chief priests and dignitaries and others who are there as well. Even some of the servants and slaves were there, such as one named Malchus, whose ear Peter chopped off in an ill-conceived attempt to defend his Lord.

Our Lord does His last miracle there, creating an ear for that man. He does even a greater display of power when He declares, "I am," and all of them fall to the ground flat under the sheer power of His voice and His word. But in spite of the demonstration of divine power in the collapse of all of them under just Him saying, "I am," in spite of the miracle of giving an ear back to a man, they are resolved to arrest Him. There is no need for a trial as far as they're concerned, because the verdict has been passed long ago, long ago.

Now the deed needs to be done. They have been afraid to act all week because of the crowds. They knew that if they tried to do something with Jesus during the daytime anywhere in public, that could precipitate a riot, because they remember the day that He entered Jerusalem and how the masses of people, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, were there to greet Him with palm branches and throwing their robes in the path as He rode in on a donkey. They were saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," and hailing Him as their Messiah. The whole city had gone after Him in that sense.

He had gone into the temple and thrown everyone out, an act of violent, divine judgment against the false religious system of Judaism. And then He had talked in the temple and literally confounded the Jewish leaders. His public persona had overpowered them on every level. They were overpowered by Him physically in His ability to clear the temple of the masses of humanity that were there, in His ability to answer all their queries and literally silence them. In the devastating record of His miracle power, the last and perhaps most well-discussed being the raising of Lazarus from the dead – all of this they were aware of. And then in that night, they even fall down under His power, see Him create

an ear, and it changes absolutely nothing. They are determined to arrest Him. So verse 12 is where we pick it up.

“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 expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.

“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. Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, ‘You’re not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ 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.

“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; they know what I said.’

“When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, ‘Is that the way You answer the high priest?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?’ So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

“Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, ‘You’re 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, and immediately a rooster crowed.” This is the Word of God.

He arrived in the garden with the purpose of meeting those who would arrest Him. His hour had come; it was time to go to the cross. He was going to die on that Passover as God’s true Passover Lamb. It is a small army that confronts Jesus, and He takes the occasion to display His glory to them, to the eleven, and to all who will ever read the account of His arrival in the garden and His arrest. He turns their well-planned maneuvers into a display of His own glory. He flattens them to the ground by the word of His mouth. He demonstrates that He is securing the disciples by having them say that they only have a right to take Him; so they cannot arrest the disciples, that would be more than their faith could bear. He creates an ear, and then He rescues Peter from a stupid act that could have cost Peter his life. Jesus upheld capital punishment which is ordained by God back in Genesis 9:6. He said, “Put away your sword, Peter. If you live by the sword you will die by the sword.” In other words, if you take a life, they have a right to take your life.

He is now in the garden confronted by this crowd that are going to arrest Him. He will not be defended by Peter or the rest of His disciples. His kingdom is not of this world. He says later, “If My kingdom were of this world My servants would fight.” His power is all on display, sufficient that it should have changed the course of their intentions, but it did not. Matthew adds that He actually said, “Do you not think that I cannot ask My Father and He will even now send Me more than twelve

legions of angels. If I need to be rescued, if I need to be defended, I can ask My Father and He'll send me twelve legions of angels."

Twelve legions of angels; how powerful would that be? One angel, one angel took out 185,000 Assyrians in the siege of Sennacherib against the city of Jerusalem. One angel took out 185,000. What would twelve legions of angels be able to do? Massive, incalculable, divine power was at His disposal. But He would not use it, because that would be to thwart the plan of God. He was born to die; that was His purpose.

So verse 12 tells us that "the Roman cohort and the commander – " and word "commander" is *chiliarchos* and the word *chilioi* is a thousand. So this notes a man who is over a thousand – again, reaffirming the largeness of this group. "The commander – " the *chiliarchos* " – and the officers of the Jews – " that would be the temple police, the security forces that kept the crowd under control there – " – arrested Jesus and bound Him, arrested Jesus and bound Him." John Calvin said, "The body of the Son of God was bound so that our souls might be loosed from the cords of sin and Satan."

And then as the passage unfolds, we see four scenes pulling together these two different dramas – the drama of the trial and the drama of the denial. Why? Why does John do it this way? Well, for an obvious reason, this is how it happened. They were going on simultaneously; it made sense to make sure we understood both of them. Beyond that, as I said earlier, I think John is showing us, at the very point of our Lord going to death, the very reasons that He was doing that – to pay for, in full, the sins that are being at the very hour by the one who would be considered to be the best follower He had. It paints a dark background to display the light and glory of God's grace. Here is grace: Jesus on the way to the cross to die for the sins of Peter that he is committing at the same time our Lord is heading to death.

Here is the contrast between the unchanging, divine, determined faithfulness of Christ and the changing faithlessness of Peter and the other disciples. Christ is exalted here, but Peter is debased, and rightly so. Even in the arraignment and the trial, as always with John, Christ is exalted. But behind the scene is this ugly black backdrop of Peter's denials so that we see the glory of Christ against that background. And I'm reminded that this is why it must be His hour, and why He must die to pay for these sins and all sins like them.

So let's look at Scene One: Jesus' trial, Jesus' trial. "After He was bound, they 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 expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people." Really amazing hardness of heart; amazing indifference of the unconverted. It isn't that they just saw the miraculous power of Jesus, they literally were knocked over by it.

The multitude is made up of kind of a conglomeration, a mongrel group. There are Gentiles there, the Romans; and there are Jews there. There are soldiers there; there are slaves there; there are priests; there are Pharisees. The heathen are there; the religious are there. It is this mixed multitude. But in one respect, they are all absolutely alike. They are all utterly blind to the glory of Christ. They have experienced – sometimes firsthand, and certainly by testimony – a three-year reign of miraculous power in the land, and they know all the record of that. No one ever denied the miracles of Jesus; no one ever tried. They have all of that information.

They have not only known of or seen His miracles, or both, but they have heard His words. They've been hearing Him all week, words like no one ever spoke. He said, "Believe Me for the works or believe Me for the words." But, still, even after that and knowing of the resurrection of Lazarus and seeing the creation of an ear, a relative of the man who was given the ear is there. They are insensible, they are unmoved, and they are going to carry out their purpose.

They're glad that it's night. They're out of the city. They're on the Mount of Olives in an obscure, isolated garden, because they were wanting to arrest Jesus a lot earlier, but afraid of the riot that might start; because after all, when He came into the city, the whole place exploded and erupted in hailing Him as Messiah. So here they are in spite of that, in spite of everything else – deep in sin, dead in trespasses and sin, blinded by Satan to the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ. Their unbelief and hardness of heart causes them to pursue their objective, the hunted animal as if He is some kind of criminal and not the Son of God as He has demonstrated Himself to be. So the *chiliarchos*, the commander and those who are with him, arrest Jesus. And at this point, Matthew tells us the disciples flee. They disappear, fulfilling the prophecy of the Old Testament, that when the Shepherd is smitten, the sheep will scatter.

They tie Him up. Why did they bind Him up? One, because they commonly did that, as people still do today, to ensure that once they capture somebody he doesn't get away. But, secondly, interesting, in Matthew 26:48, Judas told the authorities, "When you arrest Him, hold Him fast, hold Him fast."

What did Judas assume? Did Judas assume that the disciples would try to grab Him and help Him escape? Did Judas assume that He would flee? I doubt it. I think Judas probably assumed that He would do some miracle to set Himself free, which would have been easy for Him to do. And Judas was saying, "You've got to figure out a way to hang onto Him." I think they bound Him. I think they bound Him from their perspective because they wanted to put Him in a position where He was shamed like a criminal, because they were tired of the way He had discredited them, particularly the Jewish leaders.

I think there's an interesting parallel here. One of the most significant Old Testament pictures of Christ is the picture of Abraham sacrificing Isaac, and Genesis 22:9 says Abraham, when he was about to offer Isaac, bound him to the altar. God was gracious and spared Isaac and provided a ram. But from then on, according to Psalm 118:27, we read, "Bind the sacrifice with cords onto the horns of the altar."

There were horns on an altar to bind the sacrifice there. So here is Christ, the sacrifice, God's Lamb, being bound and prepared for that final offering of Himself. So they led Him to Annas first. And first is important because you need to know that there were six aspects of His trials, six aspects of His trial. There were three religious trials and three civil trials.

Now, to put the whole picture together, you'd have to put all four gospels together. Let me suggest, if you have a copy of one perfect life, you can read the section on the trials of Christ, and the blending of all the four gospels will give you the full picture. But I don't want to import that in here, because I want to keep John's intension of moving rapidly from one to the other.

Just to let you know, the three religious trials went like this – first to Annas, and that was to sort of establish a preliminary hearing that would come up with an arraignment based on an indictment.

That didn't work, so Annas sends Him to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, which is the Jewish supreme court. They have a mock trial in the darkness of night, which is illegal, and they've already made up their mind. But in order to give it the appearance of legality, they reconvene again after daybreak, and that final third stage is the public stage in front of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, Annas probably being there as well. So from Annas to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, and then at daybreak back to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin – three parts of the religious trial.

After that, there were three parts of the civil trial. They sent Him to Pilate, Pilate sent Him to Herod, Herod sent Him back to Pilate – six different trials.

Now, this is the first. This is to be the arraignment. Annas: Who is he? Annas, in verse 19, is the high priest. But in verse 13, it says Caiaphas was high priest that year. Is this a problem? No. It's like the President of the United States. If you were the President, you're still the one who bears the title; you're still designated as President.

This would particularly be true in the Jewish world, because according to Numbers 35, a high priest was a high priest for life. So they would always think of Annas as the high priest. However, the Romans didn't like that idea, because that gave a man way too much developing power. And so they were always wanting to remove the high priest and replace the high priest so that he could not accumulate massive power.

They didn't get too far, however, from the family of Annas, because the subsequent high priests to Annas were five of his sons and one of his grandsons, which meant that he, as the father and grandfather, was always the patriarchal high priest behind the scenes, and from the vantage point of the people, should have been the legitimate high priest. The Romans have run out of sons and grandsons, and so now the Romans have appointed a man named Caiaphas who is Annas' son-in-law. You can see the priestly families dominate.

Now, they all live in a series of priestly apartments that surround a courtyard where the trial is going to take place. As we read here, "Annas is the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year." The little note "that year" is kind of a scornful note, that this became a revolving door, because the Romans were forever changing this figure so as not to let them accumulate too much individual power, although it resided in the family; and the family was getting wealthier and wealthier along the way.

Now, the one thing they feared, they feared that the Romans would become their enemies; so in order to court the Romans, the priestly family basically abused the people. They allowed for the establishment of a Roman taxation system. They corrupted the worship in the temple to such a degree that our Lord, at the beginning and the end of His ministry, went in and wiped it out and called it a den of thieves. The people deeply resented the high priests, although they had respect for the office.

If you were to go to the temple on any occasion to offer a sacrifice, the sacrifice would have to be inspected by some of the priestly appointed inspectors, and it would be very likely that your animal would not pass inspection, particularly at the Passover where as many as a quarter of a million animals could be slaughtered; you would then have to buy an animal from the operation of the temple, and it would be at an exorbitant price, and all the profit would go into the coffers of Annas

and the priestly family. When you came, you had to pay your temple tax in Jewish money; and pilgrims came for Passover all from throughout the Mediterranean region with different kinds of coinage. They had to do exchanges. The moneychangers were there, and they also charged exorbitant rates; and that was skimmed off for Annas and the priestly family. That whole temple operation became known as the “Bazaars of Annas.” Well, the fear they had was that the people started going after this Jesus, that there would be a revolt, that somehow revolution would start, the Romans would come in and suppress the Revolution and remove them all from power; so this is what they feared.

We see that fear. If you go back into John 11, that fear is addressed by Caiaphas. John 11, verse 47: “The chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and they were saying, ‘What are we doing? This man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’” This is their great fear – they’re going to lose their power and their operation, their money.

“One of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year – ” he had already been installed as high priest “ – said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, you’re a bunch of idiots; nor do you take into account, this is a simple problem, very simple. It is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish. We don’t need to sit around until we have a war going on here, and people start dying and we get removed and maybe even killed. All we have to do is kill one man, one man. It is expedient for you that one man die for the people.’”

I promise you that he did not believe in the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. He did not believe in the doctrine of imputation. He had no idea what he was saying; and that’s what verse 51 says: “Now he didn’t say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation.” God at least rescued one good moment out of the priesthood that year, a prophecy that Jesus would die for the nation, and verse 52, “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 – the world.”

Here you have the substitutionary atonement of Christ for the sins of His people among the nations as well as Israel. The statement is made by an ignorant high priest, but he prophesies the truth. But from his vantage point, all it meant was, verse 53, “From that day on they planned to kill Him.” It was either Him or all of us. They were immensely rich – ruthless, ambitious, greedy – and they were frightened to lose their power.

The Talmud has an interesting passage on Annas that gives you sort of the view of the people. It says this: “Woe to the house of Annas. Woe to their serpent’s hiss. They are high priests. Their sons are keepers of the treasury, their sons-in-law are guardians of the temple, and their servants beat the people with staves.” Wow.

So they not only charged exorbitant rates in the scam over the animals and the coinage, but if you didn’t conform, they had temple police to take sticks and beat the people. This is a vile prostitution of anything God ever intended for the high priestly office. And Jesus had hit that very temple operation twice – at the beginning of His life when they all started hating Him, and now earlier in the week when He went in and threw everybody out of the temple again. Annas was furious with Jesus; Caiaphas was furious with Jesus. So that’s Scene One. They arrest Him with the intention of fulfilling the words of Caiaphas: “It’s going to be Him who dies and not all of us.”

Verse 15 shifts to Act Two, and we go from the trial to Peter's denial. 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. Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, 'You're not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' 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."

So we go from Jesus' trial to Peter's denial. Here's the contrast – now backing up before we get to verse 18 – Jesus was arrested, Jesus was arrested. Matthew 26:56 says, "All the disciples fled." At the arrest in the garden, they all split. But Peter and another disciple found their way back; they found their way back. They couldn't take the separation. They couldn't take the wondering what was going on; and we see Peter here following Jesus.

Mark adds this, Mark 14:54, "He followed from far off." He's not anywhere near Jesus. He's following Jesus, but he doesn't want anybody to know it. He's following in a shamed way; he's following in a cowardly way. He loves Jesus too much to just leave, but he's too much a coward to come up and stand where He is, so he finds a kind of hiding place where he can watch and follow.

Now, remember, in his mind are words that he gave that night in the upper room around the table when Jesus talked about His death and He said, "I'll die for you. I'll die for you. I want to go with you. It doesn't matter what it cost, I'll die," chapter 13, verse 37. All that bravado and all that self-confidence is now called into question as he sneaks around in the darkness, trying to keep his eye on what's going on – follow Jesus, but not be seen. He's not alone. Verse 15 says there was another disciple. The other disciple wasn't as far back as Peter.

Who's the "another disciple"? There have been all kinds of suggestions. Obviously, if he doesn't have a name here, you could put any name you wanted – any character like Nicodemus, or Joseph of Arimathea, or John, or Alexander are mentioned as part of the priestly family in Acts 4 – lots of suggestions. But it's pretty obvious, I think, who it is.

If you go over to chapter 20, you have the empty tomb story, the resurrection, and verse 3 says, "Peter and the other disciple went forth, and were going to the tomb." Now we know who the other disciple there is, it's John; the other writers tell us. So the other disciple in chapter 20 is John. I think the other disciple here has to be John, and that's consistent with John, although he appears all throughout his gospel, he never mentions his own name, never. He calls himself something, but never John – the disciple whom Jesus loved, that other disciple, another disciple – never John; always humble, always lowly, not so much as even naming himself.

So here we know that John is accompanying. John seems to be bolder. John seems to have gone right on in. And by the way, John is known to the high priest and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. He goes right in with Jesus, and John is known to the high priest.

You say, "How in the world did that happen? How did John get known to the high priest?" John's mother was Salome. Salome was related to Mary. Mary was related to Elizabeth. Elizabeth was

married to Zechariah, and Zechariah was a priest. So there was a family connection with John's family, and before he became a disciple of Christ, that connection could have been an important connection. Uncle Zechariah, or whatever he would have called him, was a significant priest who did his priestly duties at his proper course in the temple at the altar. Every Passover, they would probably, in going to Jerusalem and into all those events, reconnect with some people they knew in that priestly family. Because he was known to the high priest, he just walked in right with Jesus; but Peter was standing at the door outside.

Again, this big, brash, braggadocio is a coward. John just boldly walks in with Jesus. Peter is outside. The other disciple sees he didn't come in with him; so he went out, spoke to the doorkeeper, brought Peter in. Then the slave girl who kept the door – now get this; this is a slave girl who's keeping a door, this is not someone to fear. Right? He goes in the door and she looks at him and says, "You're not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" and he said, "I am not." Now that was the first lie; and it all started with a lie to a slave girl.

Why did he fear her? He didn't fear her, he feared everything, and the shock of the question launched that answer that was already premeditated in his mind for self-preservation. She's a doorkeeper; she's a slave girl. The question caught him off guard. It was unofficial, it was casual, it was insignificant, but he was already prepared to lie to save his own hide, the very one who said he would die with Christ.

And that's how temptation comes, doesn't it? When we're not planning it, it catches us off guard, it surprises us. Before we have an opportunity to kind of muster up our courage, when we're in our weak moments. You don't get formal challenges that throw us off; we prepare for those, we're ready for those. We choose our weapons; we plan our strategy. It's those sudden shocking blows that hit us blindsided, that extract our sort of knee-jerk weakness.

Did Peter forget? Did Peter forget what Jesus had just done in the garden, saved them from even being arrested, secured their freedom, made the arresting officer say, "The only person on the warrant is Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Nazarene"? And what happened to Peter? Wasn't he the guy who grabbed the sword and started whacking away? Then he ran out and now he's back, and now he all of a sudden is a denier and a liar?

He's following Jesus, but he's following too far, and Jesus doesn't rescue him this time. Verse 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." I always thought if it were me, I would have been long gone; one lie and I'm out of here. I would have gone in remorse.

By the way, about this time of year when we celebrate Easter, Passover season, so during the day it's warm, comfortably warm; but at night at that altitude it gets very cold, and this indicates that it's deep into the night, which is important, because Jewish trials were not allowed to be held at night or in secret.

So Peter is standing with the slaves and the officers in the dark by the fire trying to keep warm. He's trapped between his fear and his love. He doesn't want to leave because he loves the Lord. He doesn't want to be exposed because he fears for his own safety. But he hangs around trying to get

lost in the enemy, trying to get lost to blend into the crowd. Slaves would be domestic slaves of the priestly families; officers, temple police; and Peter's there with them by the fire. All his self-confidence is gone. He's afraid, but he can't remove himself. So there he stands, in verse 18, warming himself in a very dangerous place.

Verse 19 we shift to Scene Three, Jesus' trial again. Meanwhile back at the trial, the high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples and about His teaching. Now, this is a mockery of justice, complete mockery. Nothing legal happens here. This is to be a legal arraignment. Nothing is legal about any of it. They had already decided they wanted him dead. They were thirsting for His blood. This was not a trial, this was a plot, this was a murder plot.

But just to give you the specifics of that, it was an essential regulation of Jewish law that a prisoner must be asked no question which by answering would be an admission of guilt. We've translated that into what we call the Fifth Amendment, that a criminal cannot be made to incriminate himself. If you're going to find someone to be indicted or to be guilty, there has to be evidence beyond a self-confession; you can't make someone confess. That is drawn in our American justice system. That is drawn from ancient Jewish justice patterns. Maimonides, a great Jewish medieval scholar laid it out this way: "Our true law does not inflict the penalty of death upon a sinner by his own confession."

So, first of all, the high priest, who is the judge, says to Jesus, "Tell me about Your disciples and Your teaching." He has no right to do that. He has no right to ask Him any question at all. He is presumed innocent until He is proven guilty, and He cannot be the proof; this is illegal.

So he asked Jesus, "How many disciples? Where are Your disciples? Are there pockets of them here or there? Where are they?" He's trying to put together just how widespread this insurrection may be. "And what about Your teaching? What are you saying? What are your heresies?"

And Jesus responds by answering him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple where all the Jews come together, and I spoke nothing in secret, nothing. Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said. Bring the witnesses. Do this legally."

It's all illegal. It's even illegal according to Roman law. This, of course, was Jewish court. "They are the ones who are guilty. They need to be indicted. They're perverting justice. I didn't do anything in secret. You've been listening to My teaching all week, every day, in the temple, in the open, in public. Find somebody to comment on My teaching. You know the story of what I've done. Find some of My disciples; ask them. You can determine who is a disciple of Mine."

Jesus is not being uncooperative, He is simply asking for a legal treatment – not that He'll get it – but to expose the illegality of this event. He knows, John 15:25, "They hate Me without a cause. They hate Me without a cause."

"So Jesus calmly says, 'Why don't you ask the people who heard what I said? They know what I said.' And when He had said this –" verse 22 "– one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, 'Is this the way You answer the high priest?'"

This is the first blow inflicted against His sacred body, received from the hand of sinners. It came

from a Jew. Literally in the Greek, the terms means “to give a blow to the face.” These temple police carried clubs. What it means is he smashed Him in the face with a club. And that is a fulfillment of Micah 5:1, “They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod on the face, on the cheek.”

Even in this, He is proving to be the judge of Israel. Isn't it interesting? Micah said, “They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek.” Here He is in a court and there is a judge, but He is the true judge of Israel who is hit in the face with a rod. He is fulfilling prophecy.

Annas hates Jesus, the people around him hate Jesus, and thus that reaction. Calmly Jesus responds. Peter says, “When He was reviled, He reviled not again.”

“Jesus answered very calmly – ” verse 23 ‘ – if I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?’” The word “testify” is the operative word. “Where's the testimony here? You're indicting Me. You're hitting me in the face with a rod, for what? You're asking Me about My disciples and about My teaching. Where are the witnesses? Where is the testimony here?”

There's no hot response, there's no retort, there's no spirit of resentment – perfectly calm. He handles His attackers by laying bear the ugly reality that this is no trial at all, this is a vigilante operation, this is a murder. And justice, at this point, has to release Him, because there are no witnesses, there is no crime, there is no indictment, there is no arraignment. But instead, verse 24, “Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.” They can't release Him, they want Him dead, they want Him dead. They sent Him bound to Caiaphas.

Now, the Sanhedrin is assembled with Caiaphas in their chamber in the dead of night. This is absolutely illegal. They pull together some false witnesses in the trial before Caiaphas. I won't go into that because John doesn't go into it. You can read the rest of that in the other gospel accounts. They bring in false witnesses. They make no sense. None of it makes any sense. They finally accuse Him of blasphemy, and then they come up with the idea that He's trying to overthrow Caesar because He claimed to be a king, inventing whatever they can. But as the scene closes with Him being delivered to Caiaphas, the passage ends with us going back to Act 4, switching back to Peter's denial.

“Now Simon Peter, still standing and warming himself.” Go back to verse 18. Peter's with them standing and warming himself. Meanwhile – here we go back; he's still standing and warming himself, still with the enemy, listening to their coarse, blasphemous talk. He can't leave, and yet he doesn't want to be exposed, and it happens again.

“So they said to him.” And apparently the direct question came on three different moments, “You're not also one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, ‘I am not.’ One of the slaves of the high priest – ” this is the third time for John “ – being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off.”

So he knew of the miracle by then said, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” He was there. “Peter then denied it again.” The other writers tell us “and he swore, cursed, and immediately a rooster crowed.” Rooster crows it's 3:00 AM, 3:00 AM. In the black darkness, he just keeps denying, keeps denying, keeps denying; and no one is threatening his life. None of these are asked by somebody who is arresting him. All he had to say was, “Yes, I am.” That could have been, would have been the right answer and enough. But he dramatizes it, curses.

Turn to Luke 22, because Luke brings these two dramas together. We'll end here, Luke 22. We'll pick it up in verse 60, "Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about. I don't know what you're talking about.'" This was to the question, "Certainly this man was with him, he's a Galilean. Immediately while he was still speaking a rooster crowed." Then this, powerful moment, "The Lord turned – " from being there " – and looked at Peter."

Still in the courtyard, still on trial. This part of it, He's under the jurisdiction of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin in the same place. He turned and looked at Peter. I can't imagine what that was like. "And Peter remember the word of the Lord, how He told him, 'Before a rooster crows today, you'll deny Me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly. Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him and beating Him, and they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, 'Prophecy, who's the one who hit You?' And they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming."

That was the second phase of His religious trial. The next was to come after dawn. That's not a trial, where you have no indictment, no crime, no witnesses, and you beat the person. Peter is there, he's exposed, and he went out and wept bitterly. The difference between Peter and Judas, Judas went out and hanged himself. No remorse that turned to repentance, just remorse that turned to suicide. With Peter it as remorse that turned to repentance. He wept bitterly. He wept.

What was the difference between Judas and Peter? Judas hated Jesus Christ, Peter loved Him. And on that basis, the Lord restored Peter, didn't He? At the end of the gospel of John, "Do you love Me?" He'll ask him three times: "Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me?" one for every incident of denial. Peter said, "Lord, I love You. Lord, I love You," and He restored him to ministry and he preached the great sermon on the Day of Pentecost.

The wonderful reality of this passage is, here is a disciple sinning epically, like no previous sin recorded in the gospel. And this sin, on all accounts, would be enough to say Peter is nothing more than another Judas. Instead, he becomes the great gospel preacher on the Day of Pentecost and through the first half of the book of Acts. This is the people for whom Christ died. And while He's actually going to the cross, they're sinning against Him, the very ones He dies to save.

What could we learn from Peter? We're weak. Don't be self-confident. Don't go to sleep at prayer meeting. Don't hang around dangerous people. Don't give into fear. And if you have, ask for forgiveness. Tell the Lord you love Him, and He'll lift you up and use you.

Father, we thank You again for Your Word, so powerful, alive, alive; it just lives. Not only is it alive, it gives life. We're begotten again by this living Word. We thank You for our Savior, the revelation of Him here. Thank You for His willingness to go to the cross on our behalf. Make this story vivid in our minds, and remind us that we are weak like Peter and prone to these kinds of denials, temporary disasters. But when we turn to You in love and seek Your face, you offer full forgiveness and restoration to usefulness. We thank You for that grace which is always available to us, in our Savior's name. Amen.

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