

“John: Denying Jesus”

Isaiah 59:1-16 • John 18:12-27

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In our study of the gospel of John, as we get closer and closer to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus we begin to notice that some of the details are different than in the other three gospels. For example, when he describes Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, John leaves out Jesus praying while his disciples fell asleep. As we look at today's passage we discover that John has left out most of the details of Jesus' trial before the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin. The reason is because John wrote his gospel many years after the others were written. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were already well known in the churches and so John didn't need to repeat many of those details. Instead, as an eyewitness John wanted to fill in the gaps, so to speak. Even more importantly, as Rick Phillips points out, "John focuses on details that will highlight his particular emphasis on Jesus' sovereign control and his voluntary self-offering as a Sacrifice for our sins."

One of the literary techniques that John uses is to compare and contrast. We see here in John 18 how he has woven together the stories of Jesus on trial in front of Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest, and Peter, essentially on trial out in the courtyard. Let's begin with Jesus. The soldiers arrest him and the Temple officials lead them to the home of Annas to be questioned. Annas had been the high priest for 9 years but had been deposed by the Romans. Several members of his family had served as high priest, including his sons and now his son-in-law Caiaphas. In reality, Annas still wielded a lot of power and most Jews at the time considered Annas to be the legitimate high priest.

The problem was that almost everything they did was illegal under Jewish law. Jesus was arrested without proper charges. It was illegal to have a capital trial at night or on the day before a feast. And Jesus was interrogated and called upon to testify against himself. Annas

didn't have the legal authority to examine Jesus, but he did it before sending him to Caiaphas. There was no attempt to find out the truth or to have a fair trial. The whole thing was designed to get rid of Jesus as quickly as possible. As one commentator said, "this wasn't a trial, it was a murder." We need to remember, though, that Jesus allowed them to do this. As God in person, he was still very much in control and could have stopped it at any time. But this is what he came to do. He came to secure salvation for his people and the only way to do that was to go to the cross.

Verse 19 tells us that Annas pursued two lines of questioning. He asked Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. It seems likely that Annas was trying to find a way to "accuse Jesus of sedition by raising up a rebel band against the Roman rule and of heresy by teaching doctrines" that were contrary to the Jewish laws. Jesus' response is brilliant. He avoids talking about his disciples and instead answers the question about his doctrine with a question of his own. He says, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple...I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them." Jewish law required witnesses in order to convict and Jesus is basically saying, "call some witnesses and they will tell you what I said."

At this point Annas has lost and Jesus has won, even though he is still tied up. Often when authoritarian rulers cannot win an argument they resort to violence and that's exactly what happened here. One of the temple officers slaps Jesus.

Meanwhile, Peter and "another disciple" have followed Jesus to the palace of Annas. Many scholars believe that the "other disciple" is John himself. There are other places in the gospel where he refers to himself in a similar way. For whatever reason, John has some kind of personal connection with Annas, probably a

family connection. Since he's known to the people guarding the door, John is let in but Peter has to stay outside. So John goes to the girl at the door so Peter could come inside.

As he's coming in, the girl says, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" Notice that she's not threatening Peter. She just asks the question, probably with a bit of a sneer. In her mind it would be ridiculous to be one of Jesus' disciples. We remember back in chapter 13 where Peter said to Jesus, "I will lay down my life for you." He claimed he was ready to charge the hill for Jesus. Now, instead of standing up for Jesus as he said he would do, Peter lies and says he is not a disciple. John Calvin commented: "Now, at the voice of a single maid, and that voice unaccompanied by threatening, he is confounded and throws down his arms. Such is a demonstration of the power of man."

We find the same thing happening today. There are plenty of people in our society who see Christians as odd, maybe a little dangerous in our thinking. They sneer a little when they speak about us. Recently a commentator on one of the news shows was talking about Christians and her concern was that "they believe that our rights as Americans, as all human beings, don't come from any earthly authority, they don't come from Congress, they don't come from the Supreme Court; they come from God."

It's human nature to want to be liked, to get along. That's what Peter does. When asked if he's one of Jesus' disciples he says, "I am not." Here's the thing. Once he stepped onto that slippery slope it became easier to deny Jesus again and again. Denying Jesus the first time put him in close company with the other people there in the courtyard as they stood by the fire. After a while another person asks him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" Luke's gospel tells us that the man recognized Peter's Galilean accent. Again, Peter says, "I am not." It's interesting the contrast between Jesus saying "I am" in the first part of the

chapter and Peter repeatedly saying, "I am not." Finally, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off says, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" It's not really a question. But Peter again denies it. And at once a rooster crowed, just like Jesus had predicted.

Before we are quick to condemn Peter, we need to realize that each of us is just as bad or worse. Peter denied Jesus there in the courtyard, but other than John, the rest of the disciples abandoned Jesus when he was arrested. The first thing we see about Peter is that the reason he kept getting asked about being a follower of Jesus is that it was obvious that he was. When you spend time with Jesus other people are able to see the difference it makes in your life. As the saying goes, if it were a crime to be a follower of Jesus would there be enough evidence to convict you? Are you following Jesus close enough that people can see Jesus in your life?

Second, the world is opposed to Christ. Sometimes that means that we end up in uncomfortable situations where it seems easiest to pretend we're not Christians. Like Peter, we think, "it will be easier to tell the little lie and avoid the difficult consequences." Remember that Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Finally, what John wants us to see is that Jesus is the only one who does the right thing. He's the One we can trust, the One who achieves salvation and brings forgiveness. As we will discuss in a few weeks, Jesus restores Peter. Even when we fail, we know that Jesus has paid for our sin and that he has secured our forgiveness. When we fall we need only to repent, to turn back to Christ. That's the hope we have in Him.

Amen.