

Gospel of John Study

Session 33

In our last session we examined Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer". In this prayer, Jesus prayed for the Father to glorify Him so He could give that glory back to the Father in His upcoming crucifixion and resurrection. Then Jesus prayed for His disciples, those who had faithfully followed Him during His earthly ministry. The Lord wanted for the Father to protect the disciples that He had given to Jesus during the upcoming trial of separation from Jesus as well as to sanctify them, set them apart, for the ministry they would have after the Spirit fell upon them after His resurrection. The last section of Jesus' prayer was for the church, His current and future disciples. He wanted them to know the glory of God as well as experience the unity with the Father and the Son as it would validate their witness in the world. Jesus wanted all of His disciples to understand that they were loved by the Father and by Him.

Now in this session, we turn to the events that occur shortly after this prayer, the arrest and series of "trials" Jesus underwent that led to the cross. Here we will see how an innocent and sinless man, Jesus, was actually condemned by two human courts and sentenced to death, despite no real crime having been committed. The first of the trial is religious in nature. Then the second trial was conducted by the Roman governor whose approval was needed in order to secure the death penalty for Jesus. This session will only begin looking at the second trial but will complete the examination in the next session. Also, in this passage we'll see Peter denying that he knew Jesus three times, in fulfillment of Jesus prophecy earlier in the evening. The reader of John 18 cannot help but see how true the words of Jesus were back in His farewell address when He spoke of how much the world would hate Him and His followers.

1. The arrest in Gethsemane

Jesus and His disciples had left the upper room earlier in the evening, after celebrating the Last Supper and Judas leaving to betray Jesus. They descended from the city and crossed the Kidron Valley. The Kidron was what is called an intermittent stream. In the dry seasons, it was a ravine. In the wet seasons and during the Spring melt, it was a fast flowing stream. After crossing the Kidron valley, they made their way up the lower slope of the Mount of Olives, on the east end of Jerusalem, to the Garden of Gethsemane. The word "gethsemane" means "olive press". It was a good sized olive grove. As the city was filled to capacity with visitors for the Passover, there was little room to find lodging within the city walls, so Jesus and His disciples went to a familiar garden where He had taken them on many other instances. This was important because Jewish law required remaining within an extended city limit in order to celebrate the Passover. While Gethsemane was in this extended limit, Bethany was not. His goal was to spend some time in prayer with His disciples one last time before His coming arrest. John does not speak of Jesus' prayer in His gospel.

[John 18:1-11]

Q: How did Judas know where to lead the mob to arrest Jesus? (v.2 - He had been there with Jesus and the other disciples on many occasions. Since Jesus had "sanctified" Himself, He did not wish to escape the sacrificial death He was going to offer. Instead, He wanted to stay in the garden because He knew that's the place where Judas would come looking for Him.)

Q: Who came along with Judas to arrest Jesus? (v.3 - *A Roman cohort, their officers and the chief priests and Pharisees.*)

Q: John brings up the point that those who came to arrest Him came with weapons. Why would they bring weapons to arrest a man who had never physically harmed anyone and never threatened to do so? (*The fact that there were Roman soldiers present means that the Jewish religious leaders went to Pilate and gave him at least some sort of an explanation of what was going on. They must have told Pilate that Jesus was a dangerous man with potentially dangerous followers who were conspiring against the Empire in some way and thus they needed to be prepared for trouble when they attempted to arrest Jesus. The torches symbolize that they thought that they might have a serious search in the dark for this guy, Jesus.*)

To give you some scale here, a full Roman cohort was 1,000 troops. (760 foot soldiers and 240 cavalry) The leader, called a Chiliarch, meant “a leader of 1,000. While this was on paper, a typical cohort was usually numbered around 600 men but could be as few as 200. The Roman troops were usually garrisoned at Caesarea but during the Jewish feast days, when trouble was more likely to erupt, they were moved to the Fortress of Antonia in Jerusalem (the Praetorium) to ensure the peace or put down a mob quickly if trouble broke out. The synoptic gospels also tell of a large mob or crowd that accompanied Judas, the Roman soldiers and the religious leaders. Some in this mob would have been the chief priests’ temple guards. However, due to their failure to secure Jesus’ arrest earlier (John 7:45-48), they wanted to make sure the Romans were there to get the job done right. It is important to see that 600 Roman soldiers along with everyone else was definitely overkill for the arrest of just one man, and at most His 11 remaining disciples. However, on a theological level, this arrest made by both Jewish and Roman (Gentile) people becomes God’s indictment of the whole world being guilty of putting His Son to death. This was the world (as John has been using the term) warring against God.

Q: How surprised was Jesus by this mob coming to arrest Him? (v.4 - *not at all - He knew it was coming for Him. By including this statement, John is emphasizing Jesus’ full awareness of the circumstances and His own destiny at this point. He was not taken unwillingly and He was not a helpless martyr.*)

Jesus startled the arresting party by engaging them openly.

Q: What was the question Jesus asked those who came to arrest Him? (v.4 - *Whom do you seek?*)

Q: Based on our previous sessions, what do you think Jesus’ motivation was in asking this question? (*He wanted to protect His disciples as long as possible. When the authorities answered that they were looking for Jesus, He would be able to appeal for His disciples freedom so they could remain unmolested by the mob and the injustice about to befall Him. He would keep His word to His Father to keep those who the Father had given Him.*)

[Matthew 26:45-50]

Q: What event, mentioned in Matthew, isn’t recorded in John? (*The actual betrayal of Judas. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke all speak of Judas identifying Jesus to the authorities by greeting Him*

with a kiss. John doesn't mention this. From the way the account read, the betrayal by Judas came immediately before this question Jesus asked. We'll see this is how it went down by looking at the end of v.5. This is also the first time the disciples knew that Judas was the traitor. Jesus showed His love by not divulging this fact but rather let Judas reveal it himself in the act.)

Q: Who did the authorities say they were seeking? (v.5 - *Jesus the Nazarene*)

Q: How did Jesus respond to this question? (v.5 - *Jesus said, "I am He."*)

Q: What did the crowd do when Jesus answered their question? (v.6 - *They drew back and fell to the ground*)

[Isaiah 6:1-5]

[Mark 9:2-6]

Q: What is the emotional state of those who witnessed God's glory in these two passages? (*They were terrified. Isaiah began to uncontrollably confess his sins and the sins of his countrymen.*)

Q: What does the phrase "I AM" mean when associated with Jesus? (He is asserting His divinity, that He is God. This is a theophany, a time when God reveals His power and majesty to mankind. The normal reaction to a theophany is to fall prostrate before God. This is God's self-disclosure to this crowd.)

Notice that Jesus does not take the opportunity to run away or hide while they are attempting to get up. He remains stationary and calm. He asked them the same question a second time.

Q: What did He do in response to them answering His question the second time? (v.8 - *He secured the safety of His disciples by reminding the arresting party they were after Him, not them.*)

Verse 8 becomes a graphic illustration of the substitutionary atonement. Jesus gave His physical life for the physical lives of His disciples at this time. It foreshadows the truth that on the next day, Jesus would give His physical life for their eternal salvation. Notice that this event led to the fulfillment of the prophecy Jesus had made back in His prayer in 17:12. By forfeiting His freedom to the authorities at that moment in order to obtain the spiritual freedom of His disciples (past, present, and future) from sin for all time.

Q: What was Peter's response to the arresting party? (v.10 - *He took out his sword and lopped off the right ear of the high priest's servant, named Malchus. This is the only gospel that gives us the name of the high priest's servant.*)

Q: What does this act show us about Peter? (*He was courageous and loved Jesus. He did muster the bravery to act in defense of Jesus. In one sense, he fulfilled his own words that he would not desert Jesus in His time of need. On the other hand, it also shows us that Peter had no clue as to*

what was happening. He missed the meaning of this moment completely. In a sense this action constituted another denial by Peter in that he was attempting to stop the work of the Father in having Jesus complete His mission to die for the sins of the world. Back in Matthew 16:13-26, Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. Jesus told him that He would build His church upon that same confession that Peter had just made. Yet after Jesus told the disciples that this entailed His trial and death, Peter rebuked Jesus telling Him that this would not happen. Then Jesus told Peter, "Get behind Me Satan!" as Peter was not seeing things from God's perspective. He still wasn't here.)

The definite article is before the title of Malchus meaning that he was the special deputy of the high priest. He would have been at the very front of the crowd in confronting Jesus. The fact that John knows this man's name shows that he was certainly an eye witness to this event and that he knew this man by sight. He had some connection to this aristocracy of the Jewish people.

Q: What does Jesus command Peter to do and why? *(v.11 - He commands him to put his sword away because Jesus has a mission to fulfill from the Father and He plans on completing that mission. As a side note, it is interesting that Jesus refers to this ordeal as a cup He must drink. This is the same language He used while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane - even though John did not record that portion of the evening. It shows continuity between the synoptic gospels and John.)*

2. Jesus before the Annas

[John 18: 12-14]

John is the only gospel to record this event.

Q: What does the text assume that Jesus did for Malchus though it doesn't say it? *(It assumes that Jesus healed His ear. If Jesus had not healed his ear, Peter would have been arrested with Jesus for attempted homicide. Fortunately for Peter, he was a clumsy with a sword and Jesus stopped him before he got himself into more trouble. In a spiritual sense, by healing Malchus' ear, Jesus erased the evidence against Peter. This would be a picture of what Jesus did for us on the cross; He erased the evidence of us having sinned at all.)*

Q: Where did the Roman soldiers take Jesus? *(v. 13 - to Annas)*

Notice that after the arrest and delivery, the Romans had done their job and they returned to their barracks. They will not reappear in this portion of the account. The important element of their presence was that it shows that the Romans supported this action by the chief priests, at least to arrest a potentially dangerous insurrectionist named Jesus.

The part of the story requires a bit of historical explanation in order to fully grasp what is happening here. Annas served as the high priest from 6 A.D. - 15 A.D. The high priest was supposed to be a position that a man held for life. However, Annas had hacked off the Roman Procurator, a Valerius Gratus, and so Valerius removed Annas from his position. What is

important to know is that the high priest was the ruler over the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the political and religious ruling council of the Jews in Israel. They wielded immense power and influence among Israel and the Roman governor, whoever it was, had to work with them closely to ensure the peace was maintained. Though Annas had been deposed by Rome, this move was incredibly unpopular among the Jews who saw this as Roman meddling in their affairs beyond what proper during their occupation. Having a high priest chosen by foreigners didn't settle well with any of the Jews. It is true that Rome rarely got involved with the religious affairs of those they conquered yet for some reason, they did in this case.

However, Annas just didn't go away. He remained a "kingmaker" of sorts for the rest of his life as he was seen as the rightful high priest by the people. He was a revered "elder statesman" figure in the nation he retained great power and influence for the rest of his life. Keep in mind that normally when the high priest died, the new high priest came from the family of the deceased high priest. This led to a de facto aristocracy with the power remaining in the families who held the high offices of the Jewish religion. Annas went on to have five of his male relatives serve as high priest. Caiaphas was Annas' son-in-law. Caiaphas was high priest from 18 A.D. - 36 A.D. which was the time when this event took place.

So what we have here is a sort of preliminary hearing between the powerful Annas and Jesus before Annas would send Jesus before Caiaphas, who was recognized by Rome as the rightful high priest, but this would allow Annas a chance to gain some information directly from Jesus and hopefully make Caiaphas' job one step easier. What is also important to note about the priesthood in Israel in this time, and especially the high priest and chief priests, were that they were corrupt. They sought power and the things of the world, not God.

What is interesting is that the term "the Jews" in chapters 18 & 19 are those who hold to the minutia of the Law but fail to understand how the Law points to Jesus as the Messiah. Their intent was the execute Jesus as a lawbreaker but if they truly understood the Law, they would have become followers of Jesus, like His disciples.

[John 11:47-53]

This was the plan of action hatched after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Notice that Caiaphas understood that it was expedient (self-serving means to an end) for Jesus to die than for the rules of the Jews to lose their power and authority and place of honor with the Romans. Jesus was going to upend their position if they didn't kill Him. It was the only way to end this "rebellion" of Jesus against them and their convoluted interpretations of the Law.

3. Peter's first denial of Jesus

[John 18:15-18]

The story of Peter's denial is one that shows the isolation of Jesus, even from His most intimate friends. It added a further layer of humiliation and pain to the cross.

The word "following" in v.15 is in the imperfect tense, which shows an action that is not complete or still in the process of happening. In this case, it shows that Peter and an unnamed disciple tracked Jesus and His captors back to Annas' house. The unnamed disciple is John, the author of this gospel. He has a knack for referring to himself without using his name.

Q: Who was unable to enter the court of the high priest initially? (*v.15 - Peter*)

Q: How did Peter gain entry into the court where Jesus was being held and questioned? (*John was known to the high priest and so he came back and spoke to the doorkeeper so that Peter was allowed entry. This knowledge of the high priest of John probably came along family lines. Salome, John's mother was a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, so that John was equally related to Elizabeth who was married to Zechariah the priest and father of John the Baptist.*)

The doorkeeper, in this instance was a slave girl. Her thinking is that if this man knows John, who is a follower of Jesus, then Peter, who John vouched for to get him in the courtyard would have also been a follower of Jesus. The Greek wording gives us some insight here. The girl's question was actually a cautionary warning to Peter. As Jesus was the focus of negative attention at this meeting, notice how she puts the question to Peter. "*You are not also one of this Man's disciples are you?*" She knows Peter is with John and thus a disciple of Jesus but at the same time is warning him that if you are coming in here, you'd better keep that knowledge to yourself so you don't end up like the man being questioned. Peter, at this point, would have been cowed by his surroundings. He'd never been in the court of the high priest before and in the presence of so many of the rulers of Israel. Realizing the slave girl's warning, he denies following Jesus. After this first denial, the others would come easier, though with more intensity.

Q: What kind of fire was burning in the courtyard? (*v.18 - it was a charcoal fire*)

This fact smacks of the testimony of an eyewitness to the event. It also gives us a picture of the scene. It was still dark outside and a charcoal fire produces heat but not much light. This fire was kept going at night for the sake of the priests who had to immerse themselves during the night worship for their ceremonial duties. While the springtime was warm during the days, the altitude and lack of humidity led to cold nights. So Peter is standing around a dimly lit fire trying to stay warm with a bunch of the Jewish temple officers who arrested Jesus. They wouldn't have been able to identify him easily. This gives us one more very important detail as to the intensity of the situation. The proceedings against Jesus took place at night. It was illegal to try a man, especially a man who might face the death penalty, at night. There were incredibly rare an extreme cases where it could be done and so in this case this loophole was found to allow it which shows just how desperate the Jewish leadership was to kill Jesus swiftly. This action is just one more instance of showing the high priest and his henchmen as corrupt.

4. The interrogation of Jesus before Annas

[John 18:19-24]

Q: What were the questions Annas posed to Jesus? (*v.19 - He questioned Jesus about His disciples and about His teaching*)

Q: Which question did Jesus not answer? (*v.20 - He didn't answer the question about His disciples. This shows us He is still protecting them from danger.*)

Q: What did Jesus say about His teaching? (*vv. 20-21 - Jesus told Annas that all His teachings*

were done in public, not private. It was not the custom of the Jews to question the accused during a legal proceeding. Instead, they questioned the witnesses and that is who Jesus is telling Annas that he should really be questioning if he wanted to know what He'd been teaching. He is inviting Annas to follow correct procedure.)

The fact that Annas was questioning Jesus about His teaching shows that the concern of the Jews was theological and not legal in nature. However, when they took the case to Pilate, they had to change to make it political in nature or they knew Pilate would not return a sentence of death against Jesus based on Jewish religious law. It shows the hypocrisy and hatred against Jesus. Notice that Jesus said that He didn't teaching in secret. Talking in secret is different from talking in private, which He often did to further explain something He has taught the masses. He never changed His message to different audiences, He just gave more details on some instances. There are not secret truths to the Christian faith, no deep secrets of God revealed to select individuals.

Q: What did Jesus receive after making His answer to Annas? (*v.22 - one of the officers standing next to Jesus struck Him. The word "struck" indicates a sharp blow by the flat of the hand, we'd call it a slap.*)

Notice that Jesus does not back down. If His response was inappropriate, press charges but if He spoke the truth about this illegal interrogation, then why was He assaulted? Jesus is asking for a fair trial but His opponents are being unmasked as those who are unable to win their case in a fair trial and thus must resort to dishonest means to ensure their victory. After realizing that he was getting nowhere with Jesus, Annas sent him to Caiaphas who was the ruling high priest recognized by Rome to continue to interrogation.

5. Peter's last two denials of Jesus

[John 18:25-27]

Q: Who were the people standing around the fire with Peter? (*v. 18 - with the officers of the Jewish rulers who had participated in the arrest of Jesus. Probably many of them were temple guards. However, we know from Mark 14:66-72 we know that it was a slave girl who initiated the second question put to Jesus.*)

This sets up a great contrast. Jesus had just stood up to the powerful Annas through his questioning yet Peter, when questioned by slave girls, cowered and denied Jesus. Jesus denied nothing and Peter denied even knowing Jesus or anything about Jesus.

Q: Who asked the third question of Peter? (*v.26 - A slave of Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off in the garden*)

[Luke 22: 60-62] - Jesus looked directly at Peter as He was being escorted out of Annas' presence to Caiaphas. This look by Jesus let Peter know that He was still loved by Jesus and even though he had denied knowing Him at that moment, the situation would reverse. While Peter was crushed by his actions, it did not lead to the permanent despair that Judas heaped on

himself.

This slave was a relative of Malchus. Unlike the synoptic gospels, John makes not mention of Peter's cursing or his bitter tears before he ran out of the court. Peter cannot follow Jesus until Jesus has died for him. This was a turning point in Peter's experiences with Jesus. This was a revelation of his own weaknesses that he could not escape. Unlike Judas, Peter's experience of denying Jesus led to the exact opposite outcome. Judas' remorse led to despair and suicide while Peter's remorse led to repentance and restoration to Jesus. Like Peter, we come to know Jesus most clearly when we come to recognize just how weak we truly are and how great our need for His mercy is.

[I Peter 5:10]

[II Corinthians 4:6-12] - The key is that the light of Christ does not shine out of our lives unless we are broken, like the clay pots we are. If we remain in tact, the world sees us, not Christ. We come to know Jesus best when we are broken so that His light is allowed to reach others.

It should encourage us that Jesus does not write us off when we fail Him. Instead He works to restore us so that our hearts are filled with His strength and vision for glorifying Him. This should give us hope in all circumstances and show us that it isn't our works, but Christ's that are crucial to our lives.

6. The Jews turning Jesus over to Pilate

[John 18:28-32]

Notice that John does not describe the early morning session of Jesus being questioned before the council led by Caiaphas.

[Luke 22:66-71]

The charge that the Jews ended up leveling at Jesus which carried the death penalty was blasphemy. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, making Himself equal to God. Of course, while this was the truth verified by a multitude of signs, wonders and His own teaching, the leaders of the Jews had consistently denied this fact and refused to believe it. However, while the charge of blasphemy was sufficient to warrant the death penalty among the Jewish religion, it was not going to be sufficient to carry any weight with the Roman governor. Only the Romans could sentence people to death and so the Jews needed to whip up a legal accusation, one that would carry sufficient weight with the governor so that he would hand down the death sentence upon Jesus. John's account picks up with Jesus being transferred from the interrogation of Caiaphas to the custody of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Pilate had been appointed to serve by the Emperor Tiberias in 26 A.D. So he'd been governing this area for 4 years prior to this event. Pilate was a morally weak man who waffled often. He tried to hide his flaws by shows of stubbornness and acts of brutality. He realized that he needed to keep the Jews placated to a certain degree so that they would not instigate an uprising but also he liked to badger the Jews to keep them off balance. This place is called the Praetorium and it is the residence of Pilate while

he is in Jerusalem and it is also the barracks for the Roman troops under his command. Due to the rise of Jewish nationalistic pride that often rose to a fevered pitch during the feasts, Pilate came to Jerusalem with a majority of his troops to tamp down such outbursts from turning into revolutions.

Q: Why did Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders not want to enter the Praetorium? (*v.28 - They do not wish to defile themselves and thus miss out on celebrating the Passover that night.*)

Because of their scruples, the Jews stayed outside during Pilate's questioning of Jesus. They missed out on His self-identification which He would give to Pilate in moments. It's important to keep something in mind as we get to the questioning. Jesus is giving Pilate, a Roman leader, the same choice as He gives to all people - to chose Him or chose the world.

Q: What did Pilate ask the Jewish leaders who brought Jesus to him? (*v.29 - what are your accusations against this man?*)

Q: How did the Jewish leaders respond to Pilate? (*v.30 - Jesus was an evildoer and because of His actions, we were forced to bring Him to you. The tone is "We are sorry for bothering you but Jesus made us do this due to His own evil actions".*)

We know that Pilate had agreed to the Jews legal brief initially because he gave the Jews the cohort of Roman soldiers to arrest Jesus. They had lied to Pilate about the seriousness of the threat Jesus posed to Rome. The Jews had come to Pilate asking for troops to stop a dangerous insurrection from happening during the feast led by this maniacal man named Jesus. "*He has this huge following just ready to pounce at the Passover feast and cause trouble so we need to move fast.*" (Now historically speaking, while the Jewish leaders resented Roman rule, they were quick to dissuade stamp out true revolutionaries because it would incur greater Roman scrutiny over them. They liked their power and knew they'd lose it if they supported a coup.)

The Jews expected Pilate to rubber stamp their findings as authoritative and accurate and hand them Jesus over to them for death. Yet, Pilate ordered a new hearing for Jesus in his presence. Since the Jews would not enter the Praetorium, this hearing would be private between Pilate and Jesus and possibly a few other Roman guards or assistants. It was evident to Pilate, even before he questioned Jesus, that this was not a sincere desire to remove a dangerous revolutionary. His officers who participated in the arrest would have reported the incident to him and he knew that this man accused of sedition was harmless. The Jews were only speaking in vague generalities, nothing concrete or no stories to back up their claims. He was shrewd enough to realized the Jews had ulterior motives at work and despised this man. After all the Jews had done to secure Jesus' arrest and get Him before the governor, Pilate was basically humiliating them publicly by suggesting that they deal with Him themselves. From what we know from historical documents about Pilate, he wasn't so much concerned about justice as he was making himself look good, stroking his own ego, by making the Jews jump through some hoops and thus recognize his authority.

Here's the kicker that cannot be overlooked. Since Pilate was being asked to issue the death sentence, Jesus' death would be a crucifixion. This is exactly what the Jews wanted. Their

form of execution was stoning. This is also what Jesus had prophesied.

[Deuteronomy 21:22-23]

If they could get Jesus crucified, then it meant that He was accursed of God. His Messianic claims would be dispelled once for all as He died on a tree. Yet this is the ultimate irony in this scene here. The death the Jewish leaders wanted for Jesus thought that this would allow the Law to finally disqualify Jesus from being considered the Messiah. However, by dying on the cross, it meant that Jesus provided the means for man to be justified apart from the Law. Jesus became a curse for our sakes.

[Galatians 3:11-14]

By bringing in the prophecy of Jesus in v.32, John is reminding the readers that it is God who is truly over the events unfolding in this trial, no matter what mix of religious and political machinations are at work. This is an important verse to remember in that it reveals to us how God works in the world - most of the time through others - whether or not they belong to Him or not. We often call this providence. He is able to engineer circumstances that lead people to express themselves according to their character and desires so that His will ends up being done. Imagine the sovereignty and wisdom and power needed to accomplish this one act in getting His Son crucified. He had to get the Jewish leaders to be fearful and hateful enough to bring these bogus charges to a Roman governor who was spineless yet cruel and spiteful and then a mob of people who had been helped by Jesus to actually call for His death at the proper time.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?