

The Trial of the King (John 18:4–24)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (10/23/2022)

Introduction

Jesus knew what he was walking into on the night of His arrest. All the Gospels record that Jesus knew everything, yet He obediently pursued the will of the Father. He was the Lamb of God, the true and only acceptable sacrifice for the sins of His people. He was also the seed of the woman on a mission to crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). His death was a mystery hidden in the eternal counsel of God (1 Corinthians 2:7, 8; Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 1:18–20; Acts 2:23). But “*death was swallowed up in victory*” (1 Corinthians 15:55).

In the text before us, we wish to examine the arrest, examination, and defense of Jesus before the Jewish authorities. Here we learn a great lesson that, as we suffer for Christ in this godless age, like Christ God is using our suffering to assert His victory over His enemies (Romans 16:19, 20).

I. The King Under Arrest

1. When the soldiers and temple guard, led by Judas, approached Jesus in the garden intent on arresting Him, Jesus did not attempt to escape from them. Instead, He “*came forward and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek?’*” (John 18:4). In this initial contact, Jesus revealed to them His true identity: “*I am*” (v. 5; Exodus 3:14). His words had supernatural impact. All drew back and fell to the ground. It was a glorious effulgence of His majesty that overpowered them. A similar experience is documented concerning Paul (Acts 26:13, 14; see also Revelation 5:8, 14; 19:4). The hardness of their hearts and their being Satanically controlled is evident when they recovered and continued to pursue their objective—the arrest of the Son of God.

Jesus asked them again, “*Whom do you seek?*” He was giving them the opportunity to escape from the guilt of a deed which they *now* were able in some measure to understand. He even appealed to the seeming excess of their present approach (Luke 22:52, 53). They were under the control of the prince of darkness himself.

2. John notes simply, “*Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them*” (v. 5). It might just be speculation, but could it be that this revelation of who Jesus was jarred the betrayer into rethinking and regretting his decision to betray Jesus?

3. Peter reacted by drawing his sword and cutting off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest’s servant. Again, there are no details other than Jesus’ command to put his sword away. However, Peter’s action discloses his erroneous ideas of the kingdom of God. Thus, he sought to defend His Lord physically. He did not understand that Jesus’ death was a necessary preparation for the kingdom of God to come on earth. Luke provides more detail (Luke 22:49–51). Matthew adds, “*Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?*” (Matthew 26:53, 54). This was the Lord’s forthright “no” to the political and militant *messianism* of Jewish expectation.

4. At this point, the disciples deserted Him. John accounts only that Jesus asked the arresting party to let them go. However, “*All the disciples left him and fled*” (Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:51, 52). Was their fleeing a cowardly reaction to a sudden realization that there would be no response from heaven to prevent the injustice of the hour (John 17:12)? Sometimes our failures are allowed of God to protect us from greater consequences of our folly when acting outside of a proper understanding of God’s will and purpose.

II. The King Before the Council

1. After Jesus was bound, they led Him away, and He was first taken to the high priest Annas (John 18:12). Officially, Caiaphas was the high priest; however, the high priest was to keep his office until his death. The Romans preferred provincial government for subjected nations, but they maintained strict control it. In Judah, the Sanhedrin, over which the high priest presided, governed the people. Annas became high priest in A.D. 6 and served until he was deposed by Valerius Gratus, Pilate's predecessor in A.D. 15. He was followed by his son-in-law, Caiaphas (A.D. 18–36), the one who prophesied that “*one should die for the people*” (John 18:14). Even then, Annas, the patriarch, exerted considerable influence; thus, it is reasonable that Jesus should be brought to Annas first.
2. The narrative of John mixes Peter's three denials between appearances before Annas (vv. 15–18, 25–27) and Caiaphas (Matthew 26:69–75). However, the synoptic Gospels deal with his three denials as if they occurred in one setting. There is no contradiction in the texts, just the amount of content in each presentation. It is very likely that Peter's denials were divided between both Annas' and Caiaphas' residences.
3. It was before the *Sanhedrin*, the political authority of the Jewish nation, that Jesus was subjected to scorn and humiliation (Luke 22:64, 65). They brought false accusations and false witnesses to testify against Him. They charged Him falsely with plotting to destroy the Temple, but Jesus gave no answer—no defense—against their phony charges. So, when they could find nothing substantial against Him, they pressed Him to confess if He were the promised Messiah. He replied, “*Yes*” (Mark 14:62). This truth caused the high priest to call for His condemnation (vv. 64, 65; 15:1). In the morning, they took Him to Pilate, the Roman governor of Judah (John 18:28).

Application

1. The wicked world opposed to the truth. Thus, Satan directs the world in its fight against Christ and His kingdom. The Jewish authorities believed they were Abraham's true children. Jesus corrected them (John 8:39–41). They were not Abraham's true children, who were like Abraham—children of *faith* (Romans 4:16). Yes, genetically, but not his spiritual offspring. Because the Jewish authorities to whom Jesus spoke were not Abraham's children, they were not God's children either (vv. 42, 43). Their true spiritual father was none other than Satan himself (v. 44).
2. This portion of God's word (John 18) reveals a truth that is often overlooked and ignored by Christians. It was the *political authorities* that sought to remove Jesus because He contradicted their program. It is the same today. The spiritual conflict that rages in this world is *political*, not religious (1 Corinthians 15:24) The kingdom of Satan cannot coexist with the kingdom of God. This is why true Christians are the enemies of the state.

What was true in Jesus' day is also true in our day. We must understand this and do what we can to advance the kingdom of God. We must not act foolishly, thinking we can ignore the political and just focus on our Christian walk. That is why we must be diligent students of the Word and prayer warriors before the Throne.

3. We must seek God for courage to stand strong, no matter how the culture treats us. We must engage the political enemies of Christ in the power of the Spirit and clothed with the armor of God—not with physical weapons but with the truth of the Word of God. If they mocked and cursed Jesus, how do you think they will treat his followers (John 15:18–21)? We must not be ashamed of Jesus.