

Jesus & Peter, Part One

John 18:15-27

Pastor Jason Van Bommel

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.

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.

Introduction: The Salvation Peter Needed

Have you ever thought too highly of yourself only to run into some harsh reality and be called back to earth? Several years ago, one of my favorite singer-songwriters, Wes King, was invited by his alma mater, Covenant College, to come on campus and participate in a student music competition. He was scheduled to perform a short concert and then be one of the judges for the competition. As the date approached, he wasn't feeling well. (As it turned out, he actually had cancer that had not yet been diagnosed) So, he told Covenant College that he didn't think he'd be physically able to both perform and judge, but he could still come and do one or the other. He thought they would want him to perform, but instead they asked if he could just come and be one of the judges. Ouch! That was a blow to his ego, which cancer would further decimate, but through those struggles he learned to depend on Christ more closely as he was humbled.

I've never been much of a singer-songwriter, but I have at times prided myself on my academic abilities. Studying Greek and especially Hebrew in seminary humbled me greatly.

Peter entered this final night of Jesus' earthly life before the cross needing to be humbled. He had confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the son of the Living God. He had spoken boldly of his willingness to go to the grave with Jesus, but the truth is he needed to be humbled before he could be useful to

God in His kingdom. That's the thing about God: He insists that in His kingdom, only one king reigns, King Jesus, and all others need to check their egos at the door if they want to be truly useful for the glory and honor of King Jesus in this world.

So, Peter needed saving from himself, from his ego and his self-confidence, and Jesus is going to give it to him in two parts, first by humbling him and then by lovingly restoring him. The Bible tells us, "*God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*" In Peter's life, God is going to work out both parts of that verse: On this night, Peter is proud, and God will bring him down. But later, at the close of John's Gospel, Jesus will extend marvelous grace to the broken and humbled Peter. So, this is "Jesus and Peter, Part One," but Part Two isn't coming next week. You'll have to wait for the end of the Gospel for the conclusion of the story.

A. Peter Denies, vv. 15-18

As our passage begins today, the disciples have scattered at the arrest of Jesus, but two of them have regained their senses and have decided to follow behind the entourage taking Jesus to Annas' house, to see what is happening to their Master:

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.

It seems clear that the Roman soldiers are taking the lead on the arrest at this point. John mentions "the band of soldiers and their captain" first. Their captain is a chiliarch, the Roman term for a commander of a thousand soldiers. Though this was a smaller detachment of soldiers from the Roman garrison, it seems the garrison commander came himself to take charge of the proceedings.

The soldiers are accompanied by the officers of the Jewish leadership, because they are serving the Jewish leadership. They are delivering Jesus to Annas, who is the real power behind the high priesthood in Jerusalem. Annas had been high priest himself from AD 6 to AD 15, but he had been removed by the Romans who then set a cap of one year on the high priest's term in office. This Roman regulation was contrary to the Law of Moses, which appoints the high priest for life, so many Jewish people never accepted that anyone else but Annas was really the high priest. His position of power was secured further by the fact that 5 of his sons and his son-in-law, Caiaphas, served as high priest after him, essentially in his place.

The Jewish historian Josephus names the markets for selling animals and exchanging money in the Temple as "the bazaars of Annas," and Jesus had twice overthrown these bazaars and kicked them out of the Temple, once at the beginning of His ministry, as described in John 2, and again at the end of His ministry, as told in Matthew, Mark and Luke. So, this direct confrontation of Annas' main source of

income was likely the main reason why Annas wanted Jesus arrested and removed. But Jesus wasn't the only one who didn't think too highly of Annas and his organized crime syndicate masquerading as high priests. The Jewish Talmud contains the following curse: "*Woe to the family of Annas! Woe to the serpent-like hisses*" (Pes 57a)

As the soldiers and the officers of the Jews take Jesus away to Annas, Peter and another unnamed disciple follow after, probably keeping a safe distance. The other disciple is known to the high priest and his household. This "other disciple" seem to be John, who is very hesitant to ever name himself in his Gospel. How it is that John knew the high priest is unknown, but John and James, the sons of Zebedee, were successful fishermen in Galilee. Their family may have had business connections with the family of Annas. We just don't know how, but we do know that this "other disciple" was well known enough that that servant girl who kept the gate recognized him and let him in.

This servant girl sees Peter standing outside the gate. Then, John tells her to let Peter in and she opens the gate for Peter with a question of near-incredulity. Apparently, she knows that this "other disciple" (John) is a disciple of Jesus and she asks, partly in unbelief, "*You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?*" Her question is expressed in such a way that expects a negative answer, and so it's easy enough for Peter to say, "I am not." As he passed through the gate into enemy territory, he was concerned for his Master but also for his own safety. John apparently had a free pass because of his connection to the family somehow, but Peter wasn't guaranteed the same security, and he must have felt nervous to enter a secure enclosure with them men who had just arrested his Lord.

The first time we sin in a particular area, we're often under some sort of pressure, and it can feel necessary or expected. We can sometimes feel trapped and so lying a bit or cheating a bit or cutting some corners can seem to be the most reasonable way out. It's not, of course. It's only a way into further trouble and deeper sin.

B. Jesus Testifies, vv. 19-24

While Peter is outside in the courtyard warming himself by the fire and denying his Lord, his Lord is inside being interrogated illegally by Annas:

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.

Notice that the first thing Annas asks Jesus is about His disciples. Annas is likely concerned to find out if Jesus has a large enough following that He could raise a significant rebellion. The crowds had been huge at Jesus' Triumphal Entry just a few days earlier, and Jesus had been openly teaching in the Temple to large crowds. Annas wanted to know how many of these people in the crowds were truly disciples of Jesus.

Two of Jesus' three closest disciples are standing right outside. Peter is denying Jesus, but Jesus is still protecting Peter by refusing to answer any questions about who His disciples are. Jesus knows that this whole proceeding is illegal for several reasons:

1. The accused were never supposed to be directly questioned during the trial. Witnesses for the accused, who might defend His character, were to be questioned first. Then, the accusers were to be questioned.
2. Trials were not to take place at night, either.
3. Trials were not to be private interviews but were supposed to be held openly before the whole Sanhedrin.

So, if it seems like Jesus is being stubbornly defiant here, keep in mind that every aspect of what the man considered by many to be the spiritual leader of God's people, Israel, is illegal.

Jesus will not prop up Annas' illegal actions by cooperating with his questioning. Instead, Jesus is re-directing Annas in a way that would actually help Annas be more legal and upright in his proceedings: *"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. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said."*

In response to these words, one of the Temple officers smacks Jesus and rebukes Him for speaking to the High Priest this way. When we're doing something we know is sinful and illegal, the last thing we want to hear is the voice of someone calling us back to doing the right thing. The great offense in what Jesus said was not that He was wrong but that He was exactly right. Annas should have waited until the morning, summoned the whole Sanhedrin, called for witnesses, and held a fair trial. The Temple officer who smacked Jesus knew the law well enough to know that what was happening here in the middle of the night was deviously illegal. That's why he smacked Jesus, out of the inflamed anger of a guilty conscience.

Annas didn't want a fair trial. He wanted to get rid of Jesus. He wanted the problem solved and didn't care about the legalities. I'm sure he had told himself all sorts of righteous-sounding reasons for his actions – "We have to spare the nation from the disastrous consequences of another uprising." "This man must be a blasphemer. He said He was equal to God, calling God His Father. He even said 'Before Abraham was, I AM.'"

Whenever we are rationalizing doing something we know is illegal or immoral because we have a supposedly good end in view, we are on treacherous grounds. The ends don't justify the means. Such thinking reflects a lack of faith in God. If God has a righteous end appointed for us, He will appoint righteous means for us to accomplish it.

Having gotten nowhere with Jesus, Annas sends Him to his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who is officially the high priest, so the process of bringing charges can proceed.

C. Peter Denies Again and Again, vv. 25-27

Meanwhile, while Jesus is inside again protecting him, Peter stands warming himself by the fire and repeatedly denying his Lord:

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.

At first glance, it seems like the reports of Peter's denials here in John don't line up with the denials recorded in the other Gospels. The simplest explanation for the differences is that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Peter's recollection of the denials, while John is giving us his perspective. While Peter and John were both in the courtyard area, they were not standing together. Likely, John was closer to the house, hoping to overhear the proceedings or get some news on what is happening, while Peter is standing farther off, near the fire, trying to blend in with the servants.

While Peter's account of the events differs from John's, because they're told from different perspectives, they do not contradict each other. It seems that Peter's second denial as recorded in the other Gospels is missing from John's, perhaps because John didn't hear or see it. Instead, John seems to expand a bit on the third denial, which was a two-part denial, first to servants generally and then to one servant in particular, a relative of Malchus, the man whose ear Peter had cut off.

Since John is the only one who tells us that it was Peter who cut off Malchus' ear, perhaps John is concerned to give a more full and sympathetic account of Peter's sin. It's not that Peter was just a coward. He had tried to be brave and was rebuked by the Lord. He was confused. What was he supposed to do? His confusion and pain led to the sin of denying his Lord.

Notice how much easier it is for Peter to deny Jesus the second and third times once he's done it once. Also, the second and third denials are stronger, more firm and resolute and defiant. Once we begin down a road of sin, it is so much easier to keep going until we get deeper and deeper into our sin.

Conclusion: The Savior We All Need

Overall, this is a sad scene. What can we learn for ourselves from it? If we are to see ourselves anywhere in this scene, it should be as Peter or even as Annas. We are so prone to sin, to denying Jesus by our words and actions, to justifying what we know is wrong because of some other rationalizing reasons.

Like Annas, we need Jesus to confront us in our sin. Unlike Annas, we need to hear the confrontation and correction of Jesus in His word and repent. Like Peter, we need a Savior, One who will humble us and defend us, One who will stand for us. When we're tempted to justify our wrong actions, we need to hear the rebuke of the Law, written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And when we're tempted to deny Him, we need to remember what He suffered for us, and to remember that He did not shrink back from the price that he had to pay for our salvation. So, how can we shrink away from the price that must be paid to be called His disciple?

