**THE TRIAL AND THE DENIAL**

John 18:12-27

We’re moving very quickly in our study of John toward the events of the cross. As Jesus put it, His hour has come. “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” (12:23) The time has come for Jesus to complete His mission on Earth, to accomplish what He came here to do.

Last week a large mob of armed Jewish temple guards and Roman soldiers arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus never tried to escape into the night like He could have. The opportunity was there. No, instead, John’s gospel says, “Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to Him, CAME FORWARD…” Knowing full well that His arrest would lead to His death on the cross Jesus met this “band of soldiers” face to face. I love the way Paul describes what Jesus did in Philippians Ch 3: He “emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Phil 3:7-8) Jesus did what He did because of His love for us and His commitment to obey the Father, fulfilling God’s plan of redemption. To save us from our sins.

This morning we’re going to cover two events that take place immediately after His arrest – Jesus’ trial, or at least the Jewish part of it, and then Peter’s denial of Jesus. These are laid out for us in John Ch 18, v 12 thru 27. If you read about Jesus’ trial in all 4 gospels you will see that it actually takes place in six parts – the first three parts the Jewish trial and the last three parts the Roman trial. First to Annas (preliminary hearing); then to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (illegal trial because it’s being held in secret in the darkness of night); then a reconvening during daylight hours before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (to legitimize the trial); then to Pilate, then to King Herod, then back to Pilate. So it’s the Jewish trial we’ll look at this morning. Jesus is taken to Caiaphas, the acting high priest’s house.

At the same time Jesus’ Jewish trial is going on, Peter is in the court yard of the high priest’s house just sort of hanging out watching to see what happens to Jesus. And as we will see, just as Jesus predicted Peter is going to deny Jesus three times. So these two events – the trial and Peter’s denial – take place simultaneously. In John’s account what he does is goes back and forth between the two events in four separate scenes. By switching back and forth John is not only telling us two stories that are happening at the same time. He is certainly doing that. But John is also contrasting the faithfulness of our Lord with the faithlessness of Peter.

Let me begin by reading the passage and then we will go back and explore it in more detail.

SCENE 1

12 So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. [that’s where we left off last week] 13 First they led him [Jesus] 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. [back in John Ch 11, more on that later]

SCENE 2

15 Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. [I believe this disciple is John and will defend why I say that later] Since that disciple [John] 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 [John], 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 [Peter] 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.

SCENE 3

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. [both Annas and Caiaphas are mentioned as being the high priest, Annas in v 22 and Caiaphas in v 24 as well as back in v 13 – we’ll talk about this here in a bit]

SCENE 4

25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. [picks up where scene 2 left off] So they said to him [to Peter], "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 [one of Malchus’ relatives], asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" 27 Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

So there’s a lot going on here. Let’s go back to scene 1, v 12.

Let me begin by clarifying the relationship between Annas and Caiaphas, both described in the passage I just read as being the high priest. Annas is the father in law of Caiaphas. According to O.T. law the high priest was supposed to be high priest for life (Num 35). However the Romans were in charge. They forced the Jews to change the high priest, yearly, regularly (see v 13 – “that year”). Why did the Romans do this? To prevent the high priest from gaining too much power. Annas was viewed by the Jews as being the legitimate high priest. However Caiaphas was the latest Roman-forced appointee to that position. So this is the reason Jesus is brought before Annas first, because he’s viewed by the Jews as the true high priest. He is more highly esteemed by the Jews, older, wiser, and legitimately their high priest. Caiaphas is more or less a figure head forced upon them by the Romans.

Consider the makeup of this group of Jews who have convened at the high priest’s house here in the middle of the night – all are completely aware of Jesus’ many miracles, all the signs and wonders He has performed during His 3 ½ year ministry including raising Lazarus from the dead. They are aware of Jesus’ many teachings and amazing claims to be the Son of God. Many of those gathered had just witnessed this same night, less than an hour before, two miracles that took place at His arrest. [discuss what these were]

But despite all of this they are unmoved. They have hard hearts. They do not believe Jesus. They’re blinded by Satan and they don’t view Jesus as the Son of God. In fact they hate Jesus for making that claim. Because of their intense hatred of Jesus for what they view as blasphemy – claiming equality with God – they are determined to carry out their objective. What’s that? To kill Jesus. To once and for all rid themselves of this trouble-maker, this blasphemer.

 And so they have had Jesus arrested and brought first to Annas, their true high priest. One last thing – v 14 mentions Caiaphas’ statement that one man should die for the people. Let me read the passage from John Ch 11 where he said this.

READ John 11:47-53: So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man [Jesus] performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." [so here we see that the Jewish leadership feared the Romans would remove them from their position of importance]. But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all [you guys are a bunch of idiots]. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." He [Caiaphas] did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they made plans to put him [Jesus] to death.”

[explain what Caiaphas meant vs how God used it to prophesy Jesus death]

The Jewish leadership’s fear of the Romans and what they might do drove a lot of the things they did. They are just trying to protect themselves and their interests. Very similar to the fear the German people had in Nazi Germany under Hitler. The Jewish leadership under Roman rule had made a lot of concessions. They allowed the establishment of a Roman taxation system; corrupted temple worship putting in place the commerce which Jesus took action against twice and called it a “den of thieves”; implemented a temple tax allowing moneychangers to scam the people; the temple police intimidated the people with sticks, often beat them up if they got out of line (self-policing) – read what happens to the apostles in the Book of Acts. So all kinds of things the corrupt Jewish leadership has allowed in order to retain their power out of fear of the Romans.

The arrest of Jesus and the point of this trial has the intent behind it of fulfilling Caiaphas’ words and kill Jesus. Now let’s shift to scene 2…v 15

[Explain why the “another disciple” is most likely John – known to high priest, had a family connection, his father Zacharias was a priest, also, John never refers to himself by name in the gospel of John]

 John speaks to servant girl and she lets Peter enter the house. Peter is not necessarily intimidated by this lowly servant girl so much as he is blind-sided by her question. He wasn’t expecting her to notice who he is. He is their incognito. She catches Peter off guard and he denies knowing Jesus. By way of application that’s what temptation does. It normally catches us off guard. We are not prepared for it. We need to be watchful at all times. The devil is prowling around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. We need to be on guard. And so Peter is there in the courtyard of the high priest’s house, trapped between his fear for his own life and his love for Jesus. And out of fear he denies knowing Jesus. Word of warning – if it could happen to Peter it could happen to us.

Quickly, lets shift to scene 3, v 19. Meanwhile back at the trial...

There is nothing legal about this proceeding. Jewish trials were not to be done at night or in secret. That’s number one. Number two, the accused could not be made to incriminate themselves. They could not be convicted by their own confession. It required witnesses and evidence. That’s why Jesus responds, v 21, “Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said.” In other words, “bring in the witnesses!” Number three there are no witnesses. Number four there were no official charges brought against Jesus at this proceeding. Jesus says in v 23 after they struck him in the face, “If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?” Bottom line Jesus had done nothing wrong. He has committed no crime. He is only demanding fair and legal treatment under their own law and He isn’t getting it. He exposes the illegality of what they’re doing in this mock trial. Back in John 15:25 Jesus had told His disciples, knowing what was going to happen to Him – “But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’” So what’s happening here is a fulfillment of Ps 35:19.

So Jesus exposes their vigilante operation in v 23, “Where’s the testimony? Where’s the proof?” At this point without witnesses and no evidence that a crime has been committed they should release Jesus. But instead they send him bound to Caiaphas in the dead of night.

Scene 4 shifts back to the courtyard, v 25. Here we see Peter standing and warming himself by the fire. And two more times we’re told that Peter denies knowing Jesus. “And at once a rooster crowed.” It’s around 3 or 4 in the morning at this point. Jesus is being bullied, mocked and beaten in an illegal trial while Peter denies that he knows Jesus three different times out in the courtyard – two events going on at the same time. Luke Ch 22 brings these two dramas together. Let me read what he says, beginning in v 60: “But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him (at the end of John Ch 13), ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.”

What Peter did was bad, denying knowing his Lord and Savior. But he immediately felt remorseful for it. This led to his repentance and later, after the resurrection, to his restoration by Jesus. So much we can learn from what happens to Peter this night. Like Peter, we’re weak; often we are self-confident; many times driven by our fears; we are not on the alert, not ready for the next temptation around the corner. Sooner or later what happened to Peter happens to us. When it does the Bible tells us that we can go to the Lord and ask forgiveness. If we’re sincerely remorseful (He know our hearts) and we repentant, He will forgive us. 1 John 1:9 is a wonderful promise.

When I think of Peter and Thomas I don’t think about denial and doubt. I know the end of the story. These men offered brilliant professions not only by their mouths but also by their very lives. Both men went on to be giants of the faith and eventually gave their lives for their Lord. That’s what I think about. We are all going to sin. We will all mess up. We will say or do the wrong thing. And when we do we will hear the rooster crow. But that doesn’t have to define us. We can confess our sin and be forgiven by God. We can move on and accomplish great things for the kingdom. Jesus’ death on the cross, which we will be looking at in the coming weeks was for Peter’s sin, for your sins and my sins. He took our place. He paid our sin debt. Why? Because He loves us. Sing “Oh How He Loves You and Me.”