

The Tried and Denied Christ – John 18:12-27

Main Idea: Every step on the way to the cross reveals how believers and unbelievers see and respond to Christ

I. The Believer's Weakness | John 18:15-18

The soldiers who arrested Jesus took Him directly to the palace of Annas (V.12-14). Annas had been high priest from A.D. 6-15 when the Romans deposed him. In the following years, various members of his family held the office, including at present his son-in-law, Caiaphas. **Most Jews considered Annas the legitimate high priest, although the acting office-bearer (Caiaphas) had to sit at formal tribunals.** Jesus was not alone at His examination by Annas since John ("another disciple") and Peter had followed Him to Annas' palace. As Peter entered the compound, a servant woman spoke to him asking, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" (v.17). It is important to note that the servant girl likely recognized the other disciple (John) and indicated her lack of hostility toward Peter. The easiest answer for Peter, a stranger seeking permission to enter, was to deny His identity as a disciple of Christ, "I am not" (v.17b). **This passage highlights one of the most vivid pictures of how fragile a people's conviction can be as they follow Christ.** We remember Peter's earlier statement: "Lord, I will lay down my life for you (John 13:37). John Calvin comments: "Now at the voice of a single maid, and that voice unaccompanied by threat, he is confounded and throws down his arms. Such is a demonstration of the power of man."

Peter's failure was an instance of the frailty that is common to us all. The servant girl did not ask Peter whether he was an insurrectionist, a heretic, or even a blasphemer. She merely asked whether Peter was a disciple of Jesus. Peter, despite the girl's unthreatening manner of speech, immediately neglected his fidelity to Christ. Having identified himself as a stranger to Christ, Peter had no reason not to join those who were there to condemn Christ, so he joined a group of servants and officials of the high priest who were warming themselves at a charcoal fire (v.18). **For many believers today, in order to maintain public denial of their faith in Christ, it is necessary to blend in with the unbelieving world (culture).**

To Ponder:

1. In what ways can we act like Peter (in this passage)?
2. What are some areas that can be attractive for believers to "blend in" with the world?
3. After reading Psalm 1, what do you learn in regard to following Christ?

II. The Unbeliever's Hardness | John 18:19-24

While Peter was warming himself at the fire in the company of the Annas' servants and officials, Annas interrogated Jesus like a criminal. It is important to note that **many legal protocols were overlooked as Annas examined Jesus in what marked the first of a three-phase trial before Israel's religious authorities.** The second phase was before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Lk. 22:54), and the third was after sunrise the following day as the authorities confirmed the decision reached at the earlier hearing (Matt.27:1; Mark 15:1; Lk.22:66-71). **Jewish law did not permit the direct questioning of the accused but required a conviction to result from the testimony of eyewitnesses.** But Anna's special hatred against Jesus surpassed his willingness to follow protocols. Throughout His ministry, Jesus had often disrupted Annas' business operations in the temple (John 2:13-16; Matt. 21:12-13). Furthermore, **as a Sadducee, Annas had strong theological opposition against Jesus' teaching** since the Sadducees did not believe in a bodily resurrection. Jesus was a threat to the religious leaders in Israel, but especially to Annas. Jesus condemned the type of worship designed by Annas, calling him and his mob "thieves and robbers" (Mark 11:15-18).

Seeking to discredit Christ, Annas begins by asking not about Jesus' doctrine but about His disciples. It was common practice among Jewish rabbis to be known by the disciples they had. It was common knowledge that, unlike Annas' students, Jesus' disciples had no significant academic achievement or material possessions. With the exception of Matthew (a former tax collector), most of Jesus' disciples were laborers (fishermen, craftsmen, etc.). The problem Annas faced was that **Jesus had no reverence for earthly ranks, but He loved people while caring little for what they possessed.** As high priest emeritus, **Annas was called primarily to teach the people, and Jesus' answer showed him that he had failed.** Pharisees and Sadducees would only teach the elite but never ordinary people. Jesus answered Annas not by attacking him but by showing how it is done, "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 and what I said to them; they know what I said" (v.20-21). Jesus' defense of sound doctrine sets an example for all His servants, especially those who preach and teach Scripture. **A teacher of the Bible does not get to pick what to teach but teaches all that Scripture reveals. Every doctrine revealed in Scripture is good; every truth in the Bible is precious, and omitting any part is a direct act of disobedience** (Ps.19:7-14; Matt.10:26-28; 2 Tim.16-17).

To Ponder:

1. What difference can faithful teaching of God's Word make in the life of a church?
2. What are some "difficult passages" that have often been neglected or misinterpreted from Scripture?
3. How can I differentiate between my opinions or other people's opinions about Scripture and what Scripture actually says?

III. The Closing Denial | John 18:25-27

Peter might have considered his first denial necessary to get admitted to the courtyard, but once uttered, it was easy to repeat the mistake. This shows why it is always important for believers to be up-front about their faith in Christ instead of giving an initial worldly impression that will be difficult to change later. We observed Peter's weakness in his first denial, but how much clearer does his weakness appear in the last two denials! To his previous self-confident and self-reliant neglect of prayer (Matt. 26:42), we now add the toxic ingredient of fear of man. Peter's second denial was given in answer to a direct question. Matthew's Gospel says that the servants recognized Peter's Galilean accent, so now they suspected him of being one of Jesus' followers (Matt. 26:73). Still, Peter denied again: "I am not" (v.25). One of the officials then looked into Peter's face, and this was one of those who had been present in the garden and who was a relative of Malchus, whom Peter had cut his ear with a sword. Mark describes Peter's third denial as a truly menacing query, "I do not know this man of whom you speak" (Mark 14:71). **Having yielded himself to the first, lesser temptation, Peter was vulnerable to the second and third greater ones.**

Compared to the other Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), John's description of Peter's denial raises a question: Why did John arrange his narrative placing Jesus' trial before Annas and Peter's denial intertwined? Following the pattern of John's narrative from the beginning of his Gospel, the answer must be that he seeks to direct our attention primarily to Jesus Himself! **Jesus alone is the One we can trust and the One who alone achieves salvation for His own. Unless we can show that we are different from the corrupt Jewish leaders and cowardly, unfaithful Peter, this passage not only seals our condemnation but also offers us hope!** The hope for lost souls is found in realizing that Jesus walked His lonely way to the cross in order that He might be "wounded for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities" that "with His stripes" we would be healed (Isa. 53:5). This was Peter's hope as expressed in his first epistle, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1Pet. 2:24-25).

To Ponder:

1. What is the relationship between giving in to "little temptations" and turning away from Christ?
2. What does it mean for Christ to call people to Himself?
3. How does this account of Peter's unfaithfulness give us hope as believers?