

Comments on John 18

1 WHEN Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples. 2 And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. 3 Judas then, having received a band [of men] and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons.

4 Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? 5 They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am [he]. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. 6 As soon then as he had said unto them, I am [he], they went backward, and fell to the ground.

7 Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. 8 Jesus answered, I have told you that I am [he]: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: 9 That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none. 10 Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. 11 Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?

12 Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, 13 And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year. 14 Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

v1-14 After the Passover supper, Jesus and the disciples resort to a favorite garden to spend the night (v. 1), which place Judas knew of (v. 2). Having earlier that night separated from Jesus and the disciples (cf. 13:27-30), Judas goes and collects a group of men to apprehend Jesus and brings them to the garden (v. 3). Jesus is aware of Judas' betrayal, so he goes and meets the coming group to confront them (v. 4). They say they are seeking Jesus of Nazareth, and Jesus responds "I am" (v. 5), which bowls over the men come to arrest him (v. 6). Once they get up and recover, Jesus asks them again who they are looking for and they similarly respond (v. 7). Jesus then changes his answer slightly so as not to cause the same effect, and then seeks to procure the release of the apostles (v. 8), so as to protect them (v. 9, cp. 6:39, 17:12). Peter realizes the confrontation is a very serious one and moves to protect Jesus by attacking High Priest's proxy. Peter swings at his head and cuts off his ear (v. 10). Jesus restrains Peter and indicates it is his Father's will that he go along with the events (v. 11). As Jesus submits, the group of men take him into custody (v. 12), taking him off to Annas first,

the father in law of the high priest (v. 13) who ironically predicted that Jesus should die for the people (v. 14).

v3 Judas is leading a band of Roman soldiers with their commander (cf. v. 12) as well as a group of temple Levites and their officers (cf. v. 12). The chief priests who conspired with Judas have collected both Roman political authority and Jewish religious authority to arrest Jesus. Their intentions and conspiracy already have the end of Roman execution in mind from the very beginning.

v4 Jesus presumably goes forward to meet the group so as to avoid the disciples being surrounded by the hostile group, as Jesus is clearly interested in protecting them per v. 8.

v6 This verse has the armed crowd going backwards and falling over themselves in the process. But, why did they go backwards and fall over? The reason John gives is Jesus' saying "I am". The Greek here is "ego eimi", the same emphatic personal pronoun employed in 8:58. Such a pronouncement is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Divine Name YHWH, which is why Jesus nearly gets himself stoned in 8:59. But, here, Jesus' pronouncement of the Divine Name serves to identify himself as Jesus of Nazareth as well as serve as an authority statement.

We would assume, because of the paucity of detail, what happened was those in the front of the crowd were the Temple Levites and when they heard Jesus pronounce the Divine Name they were stunned and shocked and move backwards away from him. But when they did they backed into the Roman centurions behind them and the result was they fell into each other. This is probably the case because the Romans wouldn't perceive the meaning of Jesus' pronouncement, but the Temple Levites would.

It is possible their falling over was some sort of miraculous manifestation akin to 1 Ne. 17:53-55, but the text does not suggest it.

The subsequent actions where Jesus heals Malchus' ear after Peter attacks him serve as a public miracle of healing proving unequivocally that Jesus did not blaspheme when he pronounced himself the Lord using the Divine Name. Had Jesus blasphemed, there is no way he could have performed such a miracle. Thus, the very Temple Levites who were stunned by Jesus' pronouncement would have then immediately witnessed his healing the wounded man.

At present many of the priests, who are Levites, publicly acknowledge Jesus is the Christ but because they fear the Sanhedrin and local Pharisees (cf. 12:42) they do not confess it. However, many of them are converted afterwards (cf. Acts 6:7).

v10 Malchus, the servant of Caiaphas, would have been Caiaphas' proxy at the arrest. While it is possible Peter attacked him at random given the relative darkness, it is likely Malchus would have been acting as the leader of the arresting party, hence Peter's attack on him.

Interestingly enough, Peter is never prosecuted for this attempt on Malchus' life. Why? Because the evidence was eliminated by this miraculous healing. Peter attempted to kill Malchus, but if it ever went to court among the Jews they would have to call Malchus as a witness to the attack. Malchus would then have to confess that while his ear had been cut off, it was then miraculously healed by Jesus. Such testimony would certainly be unacceptable to the Pharisees, so Peter never gets prosecuted.

v13 John's account of the trial seemingly differs from the Synoptic accounts. Matt. 26:57-58 has Jesus being taken to Caiaphas, Mark 14:53-54 and Luke 22:54-55 has Jesus being taken to "the high priest" who at that time was Caiaphas. But, John 18:13 has Jesus being taken to "Annas first" and then John 18:24 has him being sent to Caiaphas (the KJV on John 18:24 presents it in the past tense, but this is a poor translation as the Greek is in the present tense). It appears the Synoptic accounts omit the interview with Annas because he wasn't the high priest at the time. John preserves the details, so we would assume his account is more historically accurate.

15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and [so did] another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. 16 But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. 17 Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also [one] of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not. 18 And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.

v15-18 Peter and John follow behind the group who hold Jesus captive, and John is allowed to enter into the high priest's chamber (v. 15) but Peter does not enter. John then goes out and gains access for Peter (v. 16). In the process of doing so, the woman who keeps the door asks Peter if he is one of Jesus' disciples, and he denies it (v. 17) because there are servants and officers standing nearby (v. 18).

v15 "another disciple", obviously John himself given his obvious familiarity with the details of ensuing events and his penchant

for referring to himself in the third-person, cf. 13:23, 20:2, 21:24.

"the palace of the high priest", a better translation for "palace" would be "courtyard".

v17-18 The KJV translation is obscure. The New American Standard (NAS) gives a better translation:

The slave-girl therefore who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said "I am not." Now the slaves and the officers were standing *there*, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

The woman servant was more questioning than accusative, as her responsibility was to control who came into the courtyard. If she really had suspected he was one of Jesus' disciples she would have denied entry to both him and John as well.

The text can be read two different ways, first John had gotten inside the high priest's palace where Peter had not. Peter was standing outside the high priest's palace warming himself with other servants and temple officers when John goes to the woman who watches the door and tries to get Peter in. Before letting Peter in, she asks him if he is one of Jesus' disciples. This was all in the hearing of those other servants and officers, so rather than expose himself and be rejected entry, Peter denies being one of Jesus' disciples. Peter's interests are in gaining access as had John and in protecting himself from those hostile to Jesus.

The second possible reading is John had gotten inside the high priest's palace where Peter had not. Peter was standing outside the high priest's palace door when John goes to the woman who watches the door and tries to get Peter in. Before letting Peter in, she asks him if he is one of Jesus' disciples. Rather than be rejected entry, Peter denies being one of Jesus' disciples. Peter's interest is in gaining access as had John. Peter gets in and then joins a group of servants and temple officers who are warming themselves, and is later questioned by them in v. 25-27.

The second reading is the one more commonly accepted with v. 18 taken as a segue to v. 25-27. The first reading takes v. 18 as an explanation of Peter's denial, and assumes there are two groups congregated around fires, one inside and one outside.

19 The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his

doctrine. 20 Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. 21 Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. 22 And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? 23 Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? 24 Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest.

v19-24 After the interview with Annas (v. 13), Jesus is sent to Caiaphas (v. 24). Caiaphas questions Jesus regarding his followers and teachings (v. 19), and Jesus asks him how it is he is being questioned in such a manner when there are plenty of other witnesses available (v. 20-21). Having corrected the high priest on a point of Law, one of the temple Levites slaps Jesus for his seeming impudence (v. 22). Jesus then asks the temple Levite what he has done to deserve being slapped (v. 23).

The underlying context of this conversation is the Law of Moses requires two or three witnesses for any capital offense (cf. Deut. 17:6). Here, the high priest is attempting to get the defendant to incriminate himself and is not calling any witnesses. Jesus points out to him that he did nothing in secret, so there are many witnesses, the implication being they should be summoned. Jesus is making it plain the entire proceeding is a sham, and for this the Temple Levite strikes him. Hence Jesus' comments in v. 23 that what he has said is fair and true.

25 And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also [one] of his disciples? He denied [it], and said, I am not. 26 One of the servants of the high priest, being [his] kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? 27 Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.

v25-27 Standing among a group of people, Peter is questioned by them as to whether or not he is a disciple of Jesus, and he denies it (v. 25). One of them was also present in the garden when Peter attacked Malchus and questions him on that (v. 26), and Peter once again denies being there (v. 27).

Here it is plain Peter's denial is largely an act of self-preservation, particularly in the case of the final denial wherein he is questioned concerning the attack he had made. Peter has not in principle rejected Jesus, he is presently more interested in saving his own skin in the face of a capital offense, and has to lie in order to do that. Particularly in the final denial, the denial of Jesus is only incidental as what he

is really denying is the attack on Malchus.

v25 "they", this group, clearly being inside the courtyard of the high priest, would have been composed of Jews and Levites as it is unlikely any Romans would have been permitted within the walls given their unclean status per v. 28.

28 Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. 29 Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? 30 They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. 31 Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: 32 That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die.

33 Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? 34 Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? 35 Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? 36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. 37 Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. 38 Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?

And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault [at all]. 39 But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? 40 Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

v28-40 Jesus is taken to the Roman political leader (v. 28) who questions them regarding the charges against him (v. 29). They do not respond (v. 30), so he tells them to take him away and deal with him themselves, and they then tell him Jesus has committed a capital offense (v. 31-32). Pilate takes Jesus into the hall and questions him directly regarding his kingship (v. 33), to which Jesus answers his kingdom is heavenly, not earthly (v. 34-36), and his mission is to teach the truth according to heaven (v. 37). Pilate then asks "What is truth?", and then returns to the accusing body and tells them Jesus has committed no capital offense (v. 38). He then asks them which prisoner

should be freed according to the custom of Passover (v. 39), and the choose a thief over Jesus (v. 40).

The initial questioning by Pilate is to determine whether or not Jesus is an insurrectionist who is trying to get the Jews to revolt against Rome. Jesus' reply to him makes it plain he is not, and has no interest in such things. Hence Pilate's determination that Jesus is not guilty of any capital offense, namely treason against Rome.

v28 Classic Johannine irony. They don't want to enter the Roman judgement hall because it is unclean and they would defile themselves among the Gentiles. Yet, the whole time they are setting about to murder Jesus.

v29-31 Pilate asks them a question in v. 29, note they don't answer it in v. 30. They just tell Pilate that he is guilty (v. 30) and worthy of death (v. 31). They know their case is not just according to Roman law and so they don't present it. They only tell Pilate what outcome they want, and in 19:12 they even threaten him to get it.

v32 Jesus makes these predictions in John 3:14, 8:28, and 12:32, but the ancient source is Deut. 21:22-23.

v33 Pilate retreating into his own hall effectively cuts the accusing chief priests and temple officers off from the proceedings. Clearly, Pilate wants a private interview with Jesus.

v36 "but now is my kingdom not from hence", an obscure statement. Jesus is saying "My kingdom is not from here", which is a reiteration of the first line of the verse "My kingdom is not of this world". Jesus' power is heavenly, not worldly. He has no interest in sedition against Rome, as suggested by his accusers.

v38 "What is truth?", what Pilate is trying to say is unclear. It could be a cynical politician asking Jesus of what value or relevance Truth is in the world since people don't care about the truth. Or, it could be a more philosophical rhetorical question wherein Pilate asks Jesus what really is true and how one determines truth. The context favors the former over the latter given the context of Pilate trying clear Jesus of the false accusations of an envious Sanhedrin (cf. Mark 15:10).

v38-40 "unto the Jews, and saith unto them...then cried they all again", the group of "Jews" here are not the Jewish population in general but the chief priests and temple officers in specific, as indicated by 19:6-7. Note 19:7 explicitly parallels "the Jews"

with the "chief priests...and officers" in 19:6. This is still the same group of persecutors who arrested and harassed Jesus the night before. The Jewish population in general was cut out of all of these proceedings, as was intended by the midnight hearings before Annas and Caiaphas. Thus, it was a very small and select group of Jews who shouted "crucify him" in 19:15

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