

Sermon Draft

Sermon: Two Interrogations

Text: John 18:12–27

It's dark. The disciples have fled. Jesus, with hands tied, is led by the soldiers through the winding streets of Jerusalem to the house of Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest. It was Caiaphas, John reminds us, who accidentally prophesied that it was "*expedient that one man should die for the people.*" (v 14) John and Peter follow at a distance and then enter the outer courtyard of the house.

John puts our attention on two events happening at the same time: the interrogation of Jesus before the high priest and the interrogation of Peter in the courtyard.

Jesus had prophesied Peter's threefold betrayal before the rooster crows. It's coming true. The servant girl at the door asks Peter, "*You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?*" He says, "*I am not*" (v 17). This should ring in our ears as we recall Jesus in the garden, saying, "*I am.*" The text leaves Peter warming himself by the fire and brings us inside to Jesus.

Jesus answers Annas's questions by indicating that he always taught in public. His is no secret teaching. An officer strikes Jesus on the face, the first of many blows that Jesus will suffer. ***“If what I said is right, why do you strike me?”*** Jesus asks (v 23), reminding us that all that he will suffer and endure was undeserved.

Then we're back to the courtyard. Peter is standing around the fire and is asked again, ***“You also are not one of his disciples, are you?”*** ***“I am not”*** (v 25). Peter is getting irritated, uncomfortable. A relative of Malchus, the man whose ear Peter had cut off and Jesus healed, also asks, ***“Did I not see you in the garden with him?”*** (v 26). A third time Peter denies it; he denies Jesus, and a rooster crows.

The other Gospels tell us that Peter was cursing and vehemently denying Jesus, and at the exact moment of his third and most fervent denial, three things happen: the rooster crows, Jesus turns to look at Peter, and Peter remembers the prediction of his denial. He knows what he's done, and he comes unraveled. He begins to weep bitterly, and he runs out of the courtyard into the night.

John simply tells us, ***“Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed”*** (v 27).

Two interrogations. Tonight, we’ll consider how these two interrogations confront and comfort us.

First, Peter. Peter had gone from napping to sword swinging in a matter of minutes. He had run away with John, gathered his wits, and stirred up his courage to follow at a distance. He was shaking, unsteady, nervous about the drops of Malchus’s blood on his robes. He wanted to know what was happening with Jesus, but he certainly did not want to be known as a disciple. That was too much of a risk. Peter is undercover, a secret follower of Jesus.

But there is something about Peter that causes those gathered around the fire to question him. His look. His accent. His nervous glancing around.

The servant girl at the door, the people standing around the fire, a relative of Malchus: ***“You are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?”***

I wonder what would’ve happened if Peter had been bold to confess, “Yes, I am his disciple and friend.” Would he have been brought before the high priest, called on to make a testimony, bound and led with Jesus to Pilate?

Would Peter have been crucified alongside Christ? We'll never know, because he did not confess but denied him. He was afraid of the ropes, the whips, the threat of punishment and death.

There is a temptation and a danger in the fear of death. Hebrews 2 warns us about this. This is a beautiful and comforting text, but it has a warning for us:

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same.” Just as we have a body, Jesus assumes our human nature, our flesh and blood, ***“that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.”*** The devil, the text tells us, has the power of death, but Jesus' death is the devil's destruction. That power can no longer be wielded against us. Jesus' suffering releases us from bondage, but this is a very specific bondage; it is the bondage to the fear of death.

Here's where we must pay careful attention. If we are afraid to die, the devil has us in a kind of bondage, and he can use that fear against us. He used it against Peter. Peter was afraid of suffering, afraid of crucifixion. ***“Are you his disciple?” “I am not.”*** He was a fearful and faithless witness. He was interrogated, and he failed.

Jesus used Peter's failure to teach him humility and the blessing of forgiveness. Jesus would find Peter some days later, after his death and resurrection, and on the shore of Galilee ask him three times, "***Do you love me?***" Then Peter confesses and is restored. "***Yes, Lord, you know that I love you***" (see Jn 21:15–19). Peter repented, was forgiven, and put into the office of preaching the Gospel and forgiving sins.

But Peter in his weaknesses and failings is also put before us as an example, a warning. We, too, will be interrogated. "Are you a follower of Jesus? Are you a Christian?" A confession might be costly. No matter. We confess Christ. We make the good confession.

We see this in the second interrogation, Jesus before Annas. The stakes were high, but this is why Jesus came. This is his hour. He is asked to give an account of his teaching and disciples. He replies that he taught nothing in private or in secret. He was in the temple where everyone could hear. No doubt Annas and those gathered that night had heard Jesus teaching on many occasions.

Jesus is telling the truth, but, we notice, he does not defend himself. He does not make an argument for his own innocence. He does not turn the tables on his accusers and show them as law breakers. Like a lamb who is silent before its shearers, he opens not his mouth. Jesus is the righteous One, but he doesn't claim his own righteousness. He is the innocent One, but he doesn't defend himself. He has no guilt, but he is bearing the guilt of the world.

So, Jesus stands in this earthly courtroom and does not defend himself. Why? So that he could stand in the heavenly courtroom to defend us. ***“We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”*** (1 John 2:1). Jesus before Annas reminds us of the comfort of Jesus before the Father.

We might be interrogated about our faith here on earth, and we pray that we will have faith and courage to confess the Lord Christ. But we will not be interrogated in heaven. The Judgment Day is not an interrogation, to inspect our works and check up on our sins. Jesus stands in your place, and he promises, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”*** (5:24)

Jesus goes to court, but like everything he does, it is not for his benefit, but ours. The Holy One stands in the place of sinners, suffering for our guilt, so that he can stand before the throne of God and advocate forgiveness—for Peter, for all sinners, for you and me. He declines to defend himself in order that he can defend us, forgive us, cover our shame with his blood and our guilt with his suffering.

Amen