

Our Lord's Pre-trial Hearings and Peter's Denials

John 18:12-27

John 18:12-27 - *"Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. ¹³ And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. ¹⁴*

Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

¹⁵ And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. ¹⁶ But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?"

He said, "I am not." ¹⁸ Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

¹⁹ The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. ²¹ Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said." ²² And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, "Do You answer the high priest like that?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?" ²⁴ Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also 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 him whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" ²⁷ Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed."

Background Notes

In the first section of John 18 we discussed the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Now we come to the pre-trial hearings of our Lord by the Jewish religious authorities.

It appears that there were six stages to the Lord's trial. First of all, there was the preliminary investigation before Annas, covered in verses 13-23. Annas was the former high priest, but the Roman authorities had set him aside and installed Caiaphas, his son-in-law, as the high priest in his place. However, Annas still carried a lot of weight. He was the "high priest emeritus" so he had "elder statesman" status. Many Jews still considered Annas as the real high priest, because, after all, the office of the high priest was in office for life.

The first stage of the Lord's trial is covered only in the Gospel of John. Throughout this first stage of the hearing, Annas could find nothing with which to accuse the Lord. In fact, in verses 20-21, the Lord actually challenged him to find something in His teaching or His doctrine that was subversive. Verse 20: *"Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the*

world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing."
The Lord declared that there was nothing secret in His teachings, and there was nothing that could be a threat to Rome - or a threat to *anyone!*

The second stage of the Lord's trial was the pre-trial hearing before Caiaphas, the high priest, and this is covered in verses 24-27: "*Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest*"(v24). Back in John 11 this same Caiaphas, in spite of his unbelief, had made a true prediction about the Lord's coming death. Caiaphas had counseled the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people (John 11:14).

The second stage of the trial was also held at night. Probably both these pretrial hearings took place in the same building, or in adjacent buildings that shared the same courtyard. In that courtyard Peter denied the Lord three times.

The third stage of the Lord's trial was the official religious trial before the Sanhedrin. The third stage is not covered in the Gospel of John. The Sanhedrin was the governing body of the Jews, but under Rome, the Jewish leaders didn't have the authority to carry out the death penalty. That's why those leaders brought Jesus to Pilate for a civil trial, to try to have Jesus convicted of a crime worthy of death. So the last three stages of the Lord's trial were civil trials: two hearings before Pilate, covered in the last part of John 18 and into John 19, separated by a hearing before Herod Antipas of Galilee covered in Luke 23.

Doctrinal/Teaching Points

1. Spiritual leaders are not necessarily spiritual.

Annas and Caiaphas, as high priests, were looked upon as spiritual leaders. They had the great honor of heading up the priesthood, and the privilege of being in charge of the Temple of the Lord - the very Temple that our Lord called "My Father's house." The high priest was the only person who could enter the inner room of the Temple, the Holy of Holies. The Jewish people considered these men to be spiritual men, but Annas and Caiaphas were **not** spiritual men. They were self-serving and power-hungry, and they led many people astray.

Why do you think so many of the people called out "Crucify Him!" when Jesus was on trial before Pilate? It's likely that some of these very people had cheered for the Lord at His "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem only a few days earlier! What caused such a radical change in their thinking? I dare say Annas and Caiaphas and the other Jewish leaders had a lot to do with leading the people astray, because the people thought these men were their spiritual leaders. But Annas and Caiaphas were far from spiritual.

Likewise today, spiritual leaders are not necessarily spiritual. And I'm not just talking about the deceptive far-from-spiritual "leaders" like Jim Jones and David Koresh, or Jim Baker and the Jimmy Swaggart. Sadly, there are way too many illustrations that could be given here.

Take, for example, the "Jesus Seminar." The Jesus Seminar is a group of so-called "biblical scholars" who gave their own opinions as to what quotations in the Gospels are the actual words of Jesus – the words *they* think Jesus **really** said, and or the deeds that Jesus **really** did. This group of men actually *voted* on what they thought Jesus actually said and did! The Jesus Seminar published a book entitled "The Five Gospels." (The "*five gospels*" were the Gospels of Matthew,

Mark, Luke, John and - yeah! - the non-canonical "gospel of Thomas"). In this book these so-called "Christian scholars" did a kind of "spin-off" of the Red Letter edition of the Bible, in which all of Jesus' words are printed in red. In "The Five Gospels," however, the red printed words indicate what these "scholars" think Jesus **actually said**. When they were unsure, they printed His words in pink. The words they seriously doubted they printed in grey, and the words they were convinced that Jesus did not say they printed in black. Amazingly, very few of our Lord's words are printed in red!

The Jesus Seminar men and their writings have led many people astray, because people look upon them as spiritual leaders. **But spiritual leaders are not necessarily spiritual!** Even *true* Christians who are in spiritual leadership positions can lead people astray, if those leaders are not spiritual themselves.

When I was a teenager, one of our youth leaders was a Christian man that I greatly admired. We all looked on him as a spiritual leader. Then we discovered that he was involved in an extramarital affair! I was badly disillusioned because of this unspiritual "spiritual leader." In fact, he caused a lot of young Christians to stumble in their faith. Spiritual leaders are not necessarily spiritual.

Spiritual leaders are not always spiritual. This is something all of us should remember, whether we're spiritual leaders ourselves or if we look up to a spiritual leader. If you're a leader, be careful that your lifestyle doesn't stumble other believers! And if you look up to certain religious leaders, don't put them on a pedestal - because it's possible to be disillusioned and stumbled by the sinful folly of "spiritual leaders" who are not spiritual.

2. There is a difference between a backslider and an apostate.

A "backslider" is one who **lapses** in faith, but doesn't reject the faith. An "apostate" is one who completely **rejects** the faith that he or she once embraced and professed.

Peter was a backslider. He lapsed in faith, but he didn't reject the Lord. He denied the Lord three times:

"Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not" (v17).

"Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not!" (v25).

And the third time: "One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed " (v26-27).

From the other Gospels we know that at this point that Peter went out and wept bitterly. This bitter sorrow and repentance was the beginning of his restoration - and we'll see his full restoration in John 21. Peter was a backslider - but he didn't reject his faith, and he was restored.

Judas, on the other hand, was an apostate. Judas rejected the faith and the Lord that he once embraced. It's not that Judas was a believer and then lost his salvation. No! Judas **never was a true believer!** He followed Jesus, yes - but he was not a true believer.

Peter was a backslider. Judas was an apostate. Peter will be in heaven forever. Judas will be in hell forever. There is a difference between a backslider and an apostate.

Practical Application

Are we "warming ourselves at the fire of this world"?

"Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself" (v18).

Just think of it! Peter was standing around the fire with the very officers who had arrested and bound the Lord Jesus! Peter entered the courtyard because of his connections with another disciple: *"Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest" (v15).* Possibly this "other disciple" was John. Commentaries on the Gospel of John provide a number of different suggestions on who it was, and what his connections were.

In any case, Peter was warming himself at the same fire where the people who had rejected the Lord were warming themselves. One of these very officers had struck the Lord with his hand - at a time when most likely the Lord's own hands were bound! Peter was actually gathered at the fire with officers who had treated the Lord Jesus with such contempt.

We might wonder, "How could he do such a thing?!" Well, Peter is certainly a picture of a believer who "warms himself at this world's fire" by participating in and finding fellowship with a world that rejects Christ. We all probably think, "I would never do such a thing!" But wait a minute! What are my reactions with my neighbor or my colleagues at work? How do I react to misuse of our Lord's name? What is my reaction when God and His Word are mocked in the secular classroom? Do I speak up - or am I silent? Do I quietly continue to warm myself at the world's fire?

Throughout the Gospel of John, the word "world" often refers to the evil and satanic "world system" – a system that is opposed to God. So if we join in and draw close to warm ourselves at this world's fire, we may actually be aligning ourselves with the world system that rejects our Lord Jesus and seeks to undermine God and His Word.

When I was in secular employment I once worked for a man who always closed his meetings with an "off-color" joke. All my colleagues would laugh, and I was expected to laugh as well. After all, he was the boss! As a Christian, what should I do in this type of situation? It's not easy! Should I be silent? I recall that one day I said, "Well, Jack, I guess that that joke means that the meeting has come to an end?" And then I got up and walked out. Let me tell you – that was not easy! I didn't do it with a "holier than thou" attitude – I simply made a statement. But I felt that I had to say something, because the particular joke that day was a slap in the face to the Lord Himself.

Are we warming ourselves at the fire of this world? Sometimes it's very difficult to separate from this world's comfortable fires. But let's ask ourselves this question - all of us: **Are we warming ourselves at the fire of this world?**