

The Conspiracies and Denials – *John 18:12-27*

Introduction – The whole thing was a setup. Judas knew exactly where Jesus would go that night. He had conspired with the high priests and Pharisees who then most likely brought in the Roman guards. Together they arrested Jesus with no charges and brought Him in the darkness of the night to the home of the chief priest where Annas and Caiaphas were waiting. John tells us in his opening prologue, “*In Him was life and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend/overcome it*” (John 1:4-5). We think we are in control of our lives and the plans of God. However, you cannot overcome the plans of God. They were about to sink down in the pit they prepared for Jesus (Psalm 9:13-16). But...Can you see the pit? Are you afraid of the powerful conspirators? They do ruin people's lives. They were about to ruin Jesus' life. Are you going with Him? Can you trust Him?

Bound for Sacrifice (vv12-14) – The same men, Roman soldiers and Temple guards, who fell on their knees as Jesus spoke His name, with hearts hardened, still bound Jesus and led Him away. Caiaphas was high priest, but only because the Romans had deposed Annas, his father-in-law. According to Torah, the high priest was supposed to fill that position for life, but the Romans took control and saw to it that the high priests only served a year or two. Annas seemed to still tender influence, however. Josephus records that five of his sons and Caiaphas, his son-in-law, all held the position over the years. Caiaphas, we are to recall, had earlier unwittingly prophesied about the death of Christ (11:50). And so, the Lamb of God is brought before the priest to be inspected at Passover.

A Night of Special Darkness (vv15-18) – John does not tell us who the other disciple was, but the evidence points to John himself. Peter follows Jesus but it is this other disciple who gets them into the courtyard because he was known to the high priest. He was able to bring Peter in, and as he does, a servant girl makes a casual remark, for she acknowledges that John was a disciple of Jesus. There was no violence in her question. But the man who had earlier charged the officers of the Jews with a single sword, who had boasted to Jesus “*Lord...I will lay down my life for your sake*” (13:37), caves to this young female slave with no authority. Following that, Peter joins the officers at a fire of coals. It was cold and dark, in more ways than one.

A Twisted Trial (vv19-24) – It was the night and therefore illegal to hold a trial according to Jewish codes. Annas first asked Jesus about His followers, probably because he was worried; how large was His following and were plans for some kind of uprising? The conspirators were looking for a conspiracy with Jesus. Annas wanted to know His “doctrine,” that is, His teachings. Were their secret plans to raise up a rebel band against the Romans (this would give Annas reasons to bring Jesus before Pilate)? Jesus' reply (vv20-21) was that His teachings had already been out in the open; there were no secrets. But more importantly, Jesus was calling for witnesses for His defense, noting these were not proper legal proceedings. All that got Him was a hard slap of a hand across His face. Caiaphas would be the proper channel to bring Jesus to Pilate (v24).

Before the Rooster Crows (vv25-27) – Peter stands at the fire, awkwardly trying to blend in with those who would persecute his Lord. His first denial is followed by a second and third. He might have seen his first denial as necessary to gain entrance. But once he had denied association with Jesus, it becomes harder to claim allegiance later. Was it the fear of man? Was it confusion over Jesus' actions and lack of action? It seemed that He had lost control. But no, for then, as if God controls even the crow of a rooster, Jesus' prophecy is fulfilled.

Betrayers, Deniers, Conspirators, and the World You Live In – The high priest was the man who was liturgically closest to God and Peter was undoubtedly one of the closest of the disciples. And here we have the two of them, one conspiring and one denying. This teaches us something we don't want to see and that is the darkness of the human heart (Jer 17:9), and how vulnerable we are when our confidence is in ourselves. Even after his confession of faith (Matt 16:16), even after swearing allegiance to Christ (John 13:37), Peter failed to remain faithful. This leaves us with several things to consider:

1 – In many places around the world, it is extremely dangerous to associate yourself with Jesus Christ. It was that way throughout the Soviet bloc countries and remains so in North Korea, China, many Muslim countries and elsewhere. And in our country, while there is not outright persecution, there is heavy pressure to compromise and limit what you mean by saying you are a Christian. A true follower of Christ believes Jesus is the only Way to salvation. He believes the Bible is the Word of God and that all the Word is for all people. He believes that God created man in His image, male and female, with all the distinctions. He believes God creates people and that the life He creates begins at conception. He believes that every sexual

perversion that can be imagined is defined as sin in the Scriptures and that God calls all to repentance from those perversions. He believes that Jesus is Lord of all, even the civil authorities.

Now what happens when you are standing around a fire with those who hate Jesus and, while discussing these matters openly, turn to you and ask, "You are not one of His disciples too, are you?"

2 – While we want to see good and just laws, good and just laws won't protect anyone if we are ruled by tyrants and bureaucrats who hate Jesus. Jesus was not condemned by a corrupt system, but by a system of judicial process that was the most careful and merciful in all of history. It goes for us as well. As John Adams said, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

3 – It is true that Peter denied Christ, just as Jesus prophesied. But in another sense, what Peter actually did was deny himself. He did not deny that Jesus was the great I AM, or that he was the Son of God, or that He was Lord. He denied that he was a disciple of Christ. Earlier that evening, Peter was ready to die for the conquering Messiah. But he was never ready to die for the One who washed his feet and who would submit to a crucifixion to wash his sins.

But the definition of salvation is union with Christ. Gal 2:20 teaches us that Christ died so that we might die, and lives that we might live – in Him. In this world which continues to grow in its violence towards faithful living, will you live faithfully and openly as a follower of Jesus (Mark 8:34-35)?

4 – And finally, we must see the hope of the gospel in this. Jesus never buckled under the pressure as He walked a lonely road to the cross for His people (Isaiah 53:4-6). His people needed Him to do this for we are all sinners, compromisers and deniers. Not only does He save us from our sin, but in His sanctifying grace we are being grown up into conformity to His image. The work of sanctification is His work, just as was His work of justification. He is far more in control of your life than you will ever realize, *"who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls"* (1 Pet 2:24-25).

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