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John 18 - Part III
Jesus Before Church Leaders

John 18:12-14: *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 (cf John 11:50-51). **Matthew 26:56:** But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.*

When the parallel accounts are read, it is mentioned that Peter followed and another disciple, probably at a distance. Mark mentions another person following, apparently a little to close, for there was an attempt to seize him (Mark 14:51-52), which may have been Mark himself, as there is no other mention of the incident.

Peter's denial: **John 18:15-18:** *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.*

One might speculate that Mark was the other “disciple” following with Peter. However, Peter and John were generally together, and John was known by the high priest, and likely by his servants too, so would have gained entry. John, being known by those of the high priest’s house, was not questioned, but Peter was questioned after John vouched for Peter to bring him inside. It appears that at this time that only Peter and John were there.

It was the maid who kept the door who questioned Peter. Notice her question: *Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?* The question implies that she knew that John was a disciple and thought that Peter might be also, which Peter denies for the first time. Three times Peter missed an opportunity to be a witness for Jesus.

John 18:25-27: *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.*

In Mark’s version (Mark 14:68-69), after the first denial mentions that the second person who recognized Peter as a disciple was another woman. In John’s account (verse 25), the next person or persons, also imply that they knew John was a disciple. The account of Peter’s denial varies slightly between writers. However, Luke, after the third denial, adds something that probably Peter himself told him: **Luke 22:61-62:** *61. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. 62. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*

Try to imagine for a minute: Peter has just denied for the third time that he is a disciple of Jesus, then his gaze turns to the Savior and their eyes meet briefly. Peter was emphatic that he would never deny Jesus, that he would defend him with his life. Imagine the shame he must have felt. Ultimately, Peter did die for the Lord, but before he could go through with it, that spirit of pride and over confidence had to be broken by seeing his own shame of self-sufficiency.

I see four types of people in this account, three of which are religious, which exists in every generation, including ours: Corrupt religious leaders who refuse to yield to the truth, who kill Christ in themselves and in the understanding of their followers with their false teachings (Matthew 23:13); those who do yield to the truth but deny Christ at some point for one reason or another, but repent (Peter because of fear), some who take up the cross daily because they have an understanding of why Christ died (Apostle John); and the state officials who could care less about religious affairs but want the vote and control of the religious community.

Jesus before the high priest: John reports that Jesus was taken first to Annas, father in law to the high priest (John 18:13). Nothing is said about anything happening there. It appears that this was meant to be a temporary hold until the scribes, chief priests and elders of the church could assemble at home of the high priest (Mark 14:53) where they would examine him.

John 18:19-24: *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 even taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, where the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. 21. Why ask 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, Answer thou the high priest so? 23. Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smite thou me? 24. Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest.*

While many false witnesses against Jesus came forward, they could find no two that agreed together (Mark 14:55-59). This was just a continuation of what they were doing every day, as they attempted to refute his teachings. **Psalms 56:5-6**: *5. Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil. 6. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul.*

Jesus did not even respond to the accusations. It was not until Caiaphas ask him if he were the Son of God did Jesus respond: **Mark 14:61-65**: *61.Art thou the Christ (the anointed One), the Son of the Blessed? 62. And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. 63. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? 64. Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death. 65. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.* I have been condemned many times for teaching that Jesus is the actual Son of God - not a personality, not a role played by one God, but a real and physically separate being. The church leaders of that day condemned Jesus to death because of the claim. **John 16:2-3**: *2. They shall put you out of the synagogues (assemblies): yea, the time comes, that whosoever kills you will think that he does God service. 3. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.* **2Timothy 4:3-4**: *3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

John 18:28: *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.* The leaders, these hypocrites, look to the state to carry out their dirty work. They would not even enter the Roman court because they would be defiled according to their interpretation of the law. Yet, in God's eyes they were murderers by the spiritual interpretation of the law that Jesus taught. Why did not the leaders carry out the sentence?

Being under Roman law, the Jews did not have authority to put anyone to death. The times that they did, they must have had enough influence with Roman officials, or via bribes caused those officials to look the other way. Why would officials go that far? Because Jews were an anti-Roman group, constantly stirring up trouble. So a lot of hate had built up between Romans and Jews. A similar situation exists between government and Christians today. Will there come a time when religions seek the aid of the State to stop the truth from spreading?

John 18:29-32: *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.* (Romans killed non-Romans on a cross, Jews killed with stones)

Luke brings out some details not revealed by others. Before Pilate the first time, **Luke 23:2:** *And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.* The Jews used terminology pertaining to the state in hopes of getting Pilate to do their will. But Pilate said to the chief priests and the people: *I find no fault in this man* (Luke 23:4). But all that did was to stir them into a fierce frenzy. Then when Pilate discovered that Jesus was a Galilean: **Luke 23:7:** *And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.* After Herod questioned Jesus, hoping to see some miracle, and his soldiers mocked him, he sent him back to Pilate. Jesus did not respond to all the false accusations of the Jews, at which Pilate marveled greatly (Matthew 27:14).

The laws of a nation are there to protect its citizens. When church and state are combined, then a person's religious freedom is lost and they are not allowed to worship God according to their conscience. This is clearly seen during Papal rule from the early 500s to the late 1700s, where many believers were martyred because they would not yield their beliefs. We do not yet know how this will play out in our day. But we hear of Christians in other nations who are persecuted, even killed. With over two billion Christians in the world, they will have an influence on government. How convinced are you of your beliefs today? We all need to, as Paul states: *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves* (2Corinthians 13:5). Amen.