

John 18:1-27: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] John chapter 18 verses 1 to 27 Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, Whom do you seek?

They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I am he. Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground.

So he asked them again, Whom do you seek? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I told you that I am he. So if you seek me, let these men go.

This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken. Of those whom you gave me, I have lost not one.

Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear.

The servant's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, Put your sword into its sheath. Shall I not drink the cup that the father has given me? So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.

[1 : 3 5] First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest.

But Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl, who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in.

The servant girl at the door said to Peter, You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you? He said, I am not. Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves.

Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself. The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, I have spoken openly to the world.

[2 : 3 8] I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them.

They know what I said. When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hands, saying, Is that how you answer the high priest? Jesus answered him, If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong.

But if what I said is right, why do you strike me? Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself.

So they said to him, You also are not one of his disciples, are you? He denied it and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, Did I not see you in the garden with him?

Peter again denied it. And at once a rooster crowed. John 18 describes the betrayal, capture, and trials of Jesus leading up to his crucifixion.

[3 : 4 4] His crossing of the brook Kidron should be related to David's crossing of that same brook in 2 Samuel 15 verse 23 during Absalom's coup.

A number of the gospels explore this background for thinking about the betrayal, the arrest, and the death of Christ. Christ, like David, is retreating from Jerusalem.

Like Absalom, the ruler of this age seems to have had his great triumph. His coup seems to have been a success and David is leaving the city. Judas, in these stories, is like Ahithophel.

He's the one who gives counsel to the opponents of the king. And Jesus, as he crosses over the brook Kidron, ascends the Mount of Olives, he's playing out this story of David again.

And each of the gospels explores this in slightly different ways. It's thinking of the angels ministering to him, the various people that are met. And the background of Abishai, who is the right-hand man to David, who wishes to strike down Shimei, who's cursing David to take off his head.

[4 : 48] There are parallels there with the story of Peter. Peter, who attacks the high priest's servant. In these parallels, then, we're seeing Jesus portrayed as the greater David.

Replaying the story of David, but on a grander scale. Not just dealing with the coup of one of his sons, but dealing with the ruler of this age himself.

Jesus enters a garden, which obviously carries all sorts of biblical resonances. There will be another garden later on, connected with the tomb, and in Jesus' encounter with Mary Magdalene. Once again, playing upon the Old Testament background, the background of the Garden of Eden itself. Jesus answers those coming to arrest him with highly significant words, I am.

The same words that he uses of himself in chapter 8, verse 58. And they draw back and fall to the ground. This is a response to him using the divine name.

[5 : 45] Once again, we see very strong Christology coming through in the Gospel of John. Jesus' words in verses 7-9, where he speaks about none of his disciples being lost, and his concern to protect his disciples, show his commitment to suffer on behalf of the disciples, and protect them even as they abandon him.

The disciple who attacks the high priest's servant isn't mentioned in the other Gospels, but here we are informed that it is Peter. David Dorb has suggested that an attack upon the right ear might be intended as a disqualification for priestly ministry.

Whether or not this is the case, and I'm not entirely sure, Malchus could be thought of as Peter's opposite number. Both are servants of a high priest. Peter is the lead priestly assistant to Jesus, a fact that is particularly significant from this chapter onwards in John.

And the sort of laying down of his life that Peter has in mind, something that is mentioned in chapter 13, verse 37, is this sort of thing, actually fighting for Christ, and being willing to die in that conflict. He's less prepared to lay down his life in the manner that Jesus actually requires of him. Jesus is said to act to fulfil the word that he has spoken. Of those whom you gave me, I have lost no one.

[7 : 03] And that language of fulfilment connects Jesus' words with those words of Scripture, that Jesus fulfils his own word like he fulfils the words of Scripture itself.

He must drink the cup that the Father has given to him. He must take that burden of judgment and punishment upon himself. The cup that belongs to Jerusalem and Israel for its sins, the Messiah is going to drink as the King of the Jews.

Simon Peter sort of serves as a leading priestly figure among the disciples. And while Jesus is being tried before Annas and Caiaphas, Peter is denying Jesus in the high priest's courtyard.

There's an important parallel and contrast being established. Peter stands around the fire of coals, and note that there is also a fire of coals when Peter is restored in chapter 21, verse 9.

The other disciple, which many have presumed to be the disciple that Jesus loved, was known to the high priest, as we see in verses 15 and 16. He seems to be well positioned, have good connections and access.

[8 : 08] Could it maybe be someone like Lazarus? Or would it be Joseph of Arimathea? Or would it be Nicodemus? We're not entirely sure. We can speculate. Many have seen this as the disciple that Jesus loves, the one who writes the Gospel.

Jesus is questioned, but Peter is questioned at the same time, heightening the contrast between them. Jesus' I am's contrast with Peter's not me. Peter is questioned by the servant girl at the door, primarily about his association with Christ's disciples, then by the servants and the officers warming themselves by the charcoal fire, and then finally by one of the high priest's servants, a relative of Malchus.

And Peter's denial, along with the entrance into Jerusalem, is mentioned in all of the Gospels. This is a very significant event. Peter is very clearly not the hero of the story, nor are the other disciples. Jesus is the only hero of this story. And the failure of Peter helps us to recognise that he is not the person that we're supposed to be looking up to primarily. He has his flaws.

He has his failings. Note also that Peter is questioned about not just his direct association with Christ, but his association with the disciples of Christ. We might fancy ourselves, if we were in the position of Peter, that we would stand up for Christ, that we would associate with him readily, that we would speak on behalf of the one who is our master.

