

PETER'S DENIAL

John 18:12-27

Two themes run through the passage we are looking at today: **power** and **denial**. Many people in our world these days are motivated by a drive for power, and they do almost anything to get it. Yet another large group of people in our world are motivated, or maybe we should say de-motivated, **by fear**. That fear, often taking the form of **anxiety**, blocks their ability to achieve their potential and become all that they can be. Let us see how those themes play out as we read the passage in John 18 together.

John 18:12-27 NAS:

¹² *So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him,*

¹³ *and led Him to **Annas** first; for he was **father-in-law of Caiaphas**, who was **high priest** that year.*

¹⁴ *Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.*

¹⁵ ***Simon Peter** was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest,*

¹⁶ *but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in.*

¹⁷ *Then the slave-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 slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.*

¹⁹ *The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching.*

²⁰ *Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret.*

²¹ *"Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said."*

²² *When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck*

Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?"

23 Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?"

24 So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

*25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So 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 slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?"

27 Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

Whoever came up with the saying that, "*Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,*" described the nature of godless people perfectly. We are about to see God use the corrupt nature of man to accomplish the plan that He had for the world from before time began.

Now why do you suppose people desire power over others? It probably makes them feel important, and in some cases even loved. It would certainly also provide a feeling of being in control, which would allow a person the sense that they controlled people or events. This may help them believe that they can get exactly what they want. Based on the events of this past week, we might ask what it was that Rod Blagojevich hoped to get as a result of having the power that goes with being governor of the state of Illinois. It seems like he wanted to use his power to get money and lots of it.

What we will see in these verses and those that follow in John 18 is a portrait of men who want to use their power to provide for their own selfish interests and each will do it by using Jesus as their pawn in attaining that goal. Jesus had become a threat to all those who sought after the pleasures and material wealth offered by the world and now they believed it would be in their best interests to get rid of Him. To begin with, we first see Jesus being turned over to Annas. Christ had first been taken to Annas for some preliminary questioning regarding His activities. Then Annas had Him sent to Caiaphas where the entire lynch mob of scribes and teachers of the Law were assembled.

Annas had held the office of high priest earlier (A.D. 6-15), and his influence continued through his son-in-law, **Caiaphas**, the current high priest (John 18:13). According to Jewish law the high priestly office was for life, but the Romans did not like the concentration of power in one person so they frequently changed high priests. Annas was succeeded by five of his sons and then by his son-in-law, Caiaphas. Evidently, Annas remained the power behind the throne.¹ Annas was one smart cookie and at the same time one of the most evil of all the high priests. He retained power, even though he was not the currently designated high priest.

¹ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:335.

Caiaphas was the one whom the Roman government favored, but the real brains of the Sanhedrin was Annas. He was the real leader and he knew how to handle Rome. He was probably the guy who planned the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. The entire trial was a mockery and Annas was very likely behind it all. And what an injustice has been brought upon the Jewish people because of the evil nature of their leaders who were more driven by their desire for power than for doing the right thing. The Jews wrongly have been blamed for the crimes of these leaders at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. For centuries the Roman Catholic Church called the Jewish people the "*Christ-killers*," which was the basis for anti-Semitism in Europe. Yet they are not any more responsible than the Gentiles. In fact, in the final analysis, we all are responsible for Jesus' death. He died for the sins of the world. There should be no finger pointing at any particular race or group of people.²

John 18:14 NAS:

¹⁴ *Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.*

You may remember that shortly before Jesus and His disciples came to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, He had stopped at Bethany at the request of Martha and Mary whose brother, Lazarus, had died and been in the grave four days. You may remember the highlight of this miracle when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but do you recall the role Caiaphas played in this story? Reviewing the following passage will help you to connect what happened there to what John writes in John 18:15.

John 11:43-53 NLT:

⁴³ *Then Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!"*

⁴⁴ *And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him go!"*

⁴⁵ *Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen.*

⁴⁶ *But some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.*

⁴⁷ *Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. "What are we going to do?" they asked each other. "This man certainly performs many miraculous signs.*

⁴⁸ ***If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him.** Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation."*

⁴⁹ ***Caiaphas**, who was high priest at that time, said, "You don't know what you're talking about!"*

⁵⁰ *You don't realize that it's better for you that one man should die for the*

² J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, under: "Chapter 18."

people than for the whole nation to be destroyed.”

⁵¹ He did not say this on his own; as high priest at that time he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation.

⁵² And not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world.

⁵³ So from that time on, the Jewish leaders began to plot Jesus' death.

Note that the Jewish leaders were concerned primarily with maintaining their own positions of power (John 11:47-48). When Caiaphas suggested killing Christ as the best way to do this, he was being used by God to predict Christ's death and the salvation it would bring to all people who believed.

Now let us look at the other theme in this section. D.L. Moody told the following story:

[There was] a man in New York who used to come and pray with Moody. He had his cross. He was afraid to confess Christ. It seemed that down at the bottom of his trunk he had a Bible. He wanted to get it out and read it to a companion with whom he lived, but he was ashamed to do it. For a whole week that was his cross; and after he had carried the burden the whole of that time, with a terrible struggle, he made up his mind. He said, "I will take my Bible out to-night and read it." He took it out, and soon he heard the footsteps of his friend coming upstairs.

His first impulse was to put it away again; but then he thought he would not—he would face his companion with it. His friend came in, and, seeing him at his Bible, said—

"John, are you interested in these things?"

"Yes," he replied.

"How long has this been then?" asked his companion.

"Exactly a week," he answered; "for a whole week I have tried to get out my Bible to read to you, but I have never done so till now."

"Well," said his friend, "it is a strange thing. *I was converted on the same night*, and I, too, was ashamed to take my Bible out."³

Is there anyone here who has not done something very much like the two men in this story? So when we read about Peter's denial of Jesus, let us keep that in mind. Because you see, Peter's denial of Jesus is not the point of the story. It is certainly an essential part of the story, but the real point of the story comes later, and you will see the main point in just a little while. Just to make certain you do get it, we will tell you at the end of the message. But it will be a good lesson if you can see it for yourself.

John 18:15-17 NAS:

³ D. L. Moody, *Anecdotes, Incidents and Illustrations*, (London: Morgan & Scott Ltd., 1911), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 27-28; with minor word substitutions for clarity.

15 Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest,

*16 but Peter was standing at the door outside. So **the other disciple**, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in.*

17 Then the slave-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 slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.

John mentions "another disciple" who is "known to the high priest" and his household in verse 15. This is most likely a reference to John himself. **John** can bear witness to the Passion of Christ because he was there. John was separated from Jesus at the time of Jesus' arrest when all the disciples scattered, but only for a brief time because two disciples returned and followed Jesus and the arresting officers back across the Kidron and into the city to see where they were taking Jesus. John knew either the high priest or some of his servants and therefore had access into the high priest's courtyard.

John had therefore not missed much of the action and was able to describe the whole story from an eyewitness's perspective. Unlike Peter, John was inside the high priest's palace and was able to see everything that went on, while Peter remained outside.⁴ The young woman who was the doorkeeper refused to let Peter in because she was not acquainted with him. John went in expecting Peter to follow, but when he did not, John returned and spoke to the young woman doorkeeper, probably telling her that Peter was a friend of his, whereby she allowed Peter to enter the courtyard.

Now consider this. If this young slave girl allowed John clear passage into the high priest's courtyard, she must have known that John was a disciple of Christ. So it would seem natural for the girl to ask a friend of John's if he were a disciple of Christ also, which she did when she said: "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" There was no reason for Peter to deny this relationship, but from a sense of fear he said, "I am not."

An interesting point to note is this:

"John, known to the high priest, secured Peter's entrance (John 18:15). Since his mother, Salome, may have been the sister of Mary (John 19:25; Mark 15:40), and Mary was related to Elizabeth, a daughter of Aaron (Luke 1:5), John was of priestly descent. This is confirmed by Polycrates as recorded by Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3.31)."⁵

⁴ Rodney A. Whitacre, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series – John*, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 429-430.

⁵ Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House

Now Peter found himself with the same officers that had arrested Jesus, warming himself by a fire in the courtyard. So while Peter is outside warming himself by the fire and probably wondering, "How did I ever allow myself to get in this kind of predicament?" John goes on to explain what is happening inside where Jesus has been taken.

John 18:19-24 NAS:

¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching.

²⁰ Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret.

²¹ "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said."

²² When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?"

²³ Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?"

²⁴ So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Although Annas was not the official high priest at this time, he remained the most powerful member of the Sanhedrin, and just as a former president in our country is still referred to as Mr. President, Annas was still referred to as the high priest. This was not a trial. The Sanhedrin had not been called into session. This was more like an informal hearing in order to assemble evidence to provide the Sanhedrin when they were called into formal session. It would appear by the tone of Annas's questioning that he was trying to develop a case suggesting that Jesus was preparing His disciples for a revolution against the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman government. Apparently, Annas saw the situation, at least partly, as a power struggle. He feared Jesus was planning to seize political power.

Jesus did not say anything about His disciples in order to protect them but was willing to talk about his teaching. Jesus denied having taught any secret doctrine that might be considered as a plan to overthrow the existing ruling bodies. He told Annas that all of His teaching had taken place openly in public places such as the synagogue and the Temple. If Annas wanted to collect evidence regarding Jesus' teaching, there were hundreds, if not thousands of witnesses available who had heard Jesus teach. If they had any evidence that He was guilty of plotting an overthrow of the government, it was their responsibility to produce witnesses that would testify against Jesus. Even the private talks Jesus had with His disciples did not include any secret plans or motives. There was simply no evidence that would substantiate that Jesus had done anything wrong.

One of the officers did not like the way Jesus was answering the questions, either the

Publishers, 1990), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 481.

content or the tone, so he hit Jesus in the face. This unofficial, preliminary hearing was filled with illegal acts, and this was one of them. It was also improper according to judicial procedure to try to get a defendant to implicate himself.⁶ But from the moment of the arrest, it was obvious that the Jewish leaders were not going to follow proper procedures for a properly conducted trial. In verse 23 Jesus was stating the plain and simple fact that He was entitled to a fair trial. After being questioned by Annas, Jesus was sent on to Caiaphas, the ruling high priest. Mark records that this questioning before Caiaphas included the entire Jewish council (Mark 14:53-65). The religious leaders knew they had no grounds for charging Jesus, so they were about to build evidence against Him by using false witnesses.⁷

John 18:25-27 NAS:

²⁵ *Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So 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 slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?"*

²⁷ *Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.*

While Jesus was being questioned by Annas, Peter who was still standing and warming himself next to the fire in the courtyard, was drawing the attention of the officers and servants in the courtyard who were beginning to get a little suspicious of this stranger in their midst. So they said to Peter, "*You are not also one of His disciples, are you?*" Once again Peter denied it, and said, "*I am not.*"

Then, ironically, one of the slaves in the courtyard who also happened to be a relative of Malchus, the slave who had his ear cut off by Peter, challenged Peter by asking him: "*Did I not see you in the garden with Him?*" Peter for a third time denied knowing Jesus. Luke sheds some additional light on this story.

Luke 22:54-62 NAS:

⁵⁴ *Having arrested Him (Jesus)⁸, they led Him away and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance.*

⁵⁵ *After they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them.*

⁵⁶ *And a servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, "This man was with Him too."*

⁵⁷ *But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him."*

⁵⁸ *A little later, another saw him and said, "You are one of them too!" But*

⁶ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:336.

⁷ Barton B. Bruce et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 451.

⁸ Parentheses added.

Peter said, "Man, I am not!"

59 After about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too."

60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed.

61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times."

62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

Apparently, as Jesus was being led out of Annas' headquarters, Peter had just denied Jesus for the third time. The rooster crowed and Peter caught Jesus' glance and was filled with guilt and shame. He hurried out of the courtyard and wept bitterly.

Whenever we look at this story we are reminded of how impulsive Peter could be and how easily he could be provoked to do the wrong thing. For this reason Peter had to be extra careful about the company he kept. He had already committed the criminal act of assault earlier in the evening, and now he had placed himself in a situation where he was surrounded by the enemies of Christ. He was in a bad place and quickly lost his courage, denying his Lord three times, just as Jesus said he would.

But at the same time we need to remember the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 22:31-34 NAS: (Jesus is speaking to Peter)

31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat;

*32 **but I have prayed for you,** that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."*

33 But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!"

34 And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."

This reminds us that although Peter could be caught up in the temptation of the moment, and even give in to it, nevertheless **Jesus had prayed for Peter and the result would be that He would be a more committed servant to Christ because of His failure.**

Remember Romans 8:28? "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

Peter was human, like the rest of us. We believe his story is recorded both for our encouragement and as a word of warning. Peter was enthusiastic for Christ. He was eager to speak up and to accomplish things for Christ. Yet, when the test came, as it comes to all of us in one form or another, his fear won out.

We do not feel it fair for anyone to be critical of Peter's behavior in this story. All believers have denied Christ at one time or another because of our fondness for the things Satan offers us in this world. But no matter how good something appears, if it means we have to deny Christ to get it, whatever it is will ultimately bring us guilt and shame. James Montgomery Boice has said:

"Those that warm themselves with evil doers grow cold towards good people and good things, and those that are fond of the devil's fire-side are in danger of the devil's fire."⁹

So, which of these temptations comes closer to yours? Is your temptation a pull toward power, to always be in control of the people and events around you? Then you need to take heart in the fact that God is in control. God can be powerful without corruption. He is the all-powerful Sovereign. Our role is to trust Him and let Him run the world and the situations around us.

Or are you more like Peter? Is it fear that causes you to hide, worry, and be anxious? Peter loved Jesus (John 21:15-17), yet out of fear for his own safety he covered up his allegiance to Christ. And is not it fear that often closes our mouths? Maybe not fear for our lives, but fear of what others will think, or of losing a job, or of not being politically correct. We need to remember that God tells us many times throughout the Scriptures, "*Do not be afraid.*"¹⁰ Are we not glad that Jesus had no concern for being politically correct? When the next moment of testing comes, let us each resolve to call on God for strength to do the right thing.

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *An Expository Commentary – John, Volume 5: Triumph through Tragedy (John 18-21)*, Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1410-1412.

¹⁰ For instance, Joshua 1:9; John 14:27; Psalm 56:4; Jeremiah 1:8; Hebrews 13:5-6