



John 18:28

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Reflection

Two terrible things have just happened to Peter simultaneously. It's the early hours of

the morning on Good Friday in the courtyard of the High Priest's compound in Jerusalem. Jesus has been arrested and is subject to an interrogation inside. It's dark and cold and Peter is huddled incognito around a fire with members of the high priest's staff and soldiers and one other follower of Jesus (most likely John). Peter's an emotional wreck, but his body is pumped full of adrenalin because he's in great danger. Three times he's had to fend off being recognized as a follower of Jesus – with a lie. The third time, and most recently, one of the very relatives of the high priest's servant whom Peter only hours earlier had attacked with a sword had challenged him with these words,

‘Didn't I see you with him in the garden?’

And just as Peter was fumbling out another lie two terrible things happened simultaneously. Firstly, a cock crowed, and secondly, at that exact moment, there was a commotion at the door to the high priest's compound. Jesus is there, bound, looking like he's been struck across the face and being pushed and prodded in the direction of the chambers in which the Sanhedrin meets. At the exact instant that the cock crowed Luke 22:61 records,

61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: 'Before the cock crows today, you will disown me three times.'

As Peter locks eyes with Jesus all the fear and adrenalin instantly seep out of his body. Jesus' eyes penetrate his soul. And Jesus' words, forgotten in the turmoil, come painfully flooding back, threatening to drown him in bitter grief,

‘Before the cock crows today, you will disown me three times.’

Attention around the fire has been diverted from Peter to Jesus. Again, Jesus saves him. Jesus had saved his disciples in Gethsemane,

‘If you are looking for me, then let these men go.’ John 18:8

He'd saved Peter after he'd rashly struck out at the high priest's servant cutting off

his ear with his sword – Jesus healing the man and surrendering himself had drawn attention away from Peter’s act of treason. And finally, here again, when a relative of the high priest’s servant and a witness of Peter’s act in Gethsemane is about to expose Peter Jesus again intervenes, crossing the high priest’s courtyard, diverting attention away from Peter and for a third time saving his disciple. Three times Peter had been saved by Jesus; and three times he’d denied his Lord. It was just as Jesus had predicted in the Upper Room and just as Jesus had prayed to his Father in John 17,

12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to de-

struction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

Peter is left to shame and bitter regret. Jesus is taken from Annas, the puppet-master high priest, to Caiaphas his son-in-law, the official high priest and chairman of the seventy-member Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. During Jesus' preliminary interrogation by Annas word had been urgently sent to members of the Sanhedrin, servants rapping on doors late at night. Urgent news that the insurrectionist, the one who'd so embarrassed them and threatened to cause an uprising in the temple courts earlier in the week had been arrested. In various states of dishevelment and haste, the teachers of the law and elders were gathering at Caiaphas' house, to urgently deliberate on this latest turn of

events. Today's passage, set just after Jesus' trial by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin explains the haste behind these midnight manoeuvrings. Reading just a single verse today, John 18:28,

28 Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.

Why couldn't they have thrown Jesus in a cell and waited until morning? Because of the Passover. It was against to the law to execute prisoners during the seven-day Passover festival which accounts for the mad rush the night before. The arrest of

Jesus was no criminal masterpiece, no carefully planned and executed enterprise by Annas or Caiaphas. It was an opportunistic, ill thought-out grab, handed to them on a platter by Judas' treachery. John glides over Jesus' midnight trial in front of the Sanhedrin; the other gospels fill us in. Just as members of the Jewish ruling council were cobbled together and brought in in their nightgowns, so were so-called 'witnesses', being cajoled into giving false testimony. We read in Matthew's gospel that none of their accounts added up or reconciled but the verdict in this kangaroo court was never in doubt. The opportunity to swiftly do away with Jesus under the cover of darkness was too great for these wicked men to quibble with due process. Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin ends in melodrama, as we

read in Matthew,

65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. 66 What do you think?'

'He is worthy of death,' they answered.

We then read in today's passage,

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be able to eat the Passover.

It's day break. The sinister deed is almost done. It will now come down to Joseph Caiaphas' influence with the Romans. In an era where the Romans, forever with one eye on Jewish uprisings, deposed high priests at will, it is a testament to Caiaphas' political skill and acceptability to the Roman prefects that he held office for eighteen years, by far the longest tenure of any high priest in the period. In fact, by the time he was deposed in AD 36 the office of high priest had lost all credibility amongst the Jewish people. Jesus' fate lies in the hands of this political serpent who'll now attempt to pressure Pontius Pilate to have Jesus swiftly executed.

Think

With what time remains this morning consider the pace of the narrative and the sudden downfall of Jesus. In less than 12 hours Jesus will go from sharing an intimate, private meal with his closest friends in the world to having nails driven through his hands and feet into a splintered wooden cross at the side of a busy Roman highway. Consider the suddenness and horror of this turn of events and the psychological effect it would have had on Jesus' followers and his family who were with him in Jerusalem. But think most of Jesus. He is the victim. He's the one going through unspeakable emotional and physical agony. And yet through it all his concern is for the people around him. He spends his last evening on earth not being comforted but comforting his disciples. Think through Je-

Jesus' words to them and his prayers. See how he draws so deeply on his relationship with his Father in this hour. See him saving Peter three times this night, and ensuring that none of his disciples are harmed in the slightest way. What an example Jesus sets for us in this dire turn of events in the way he relates to those nearest and dearest to him right up to the end!

Pray

Spend some time praying to Jesus this morning thanking him for what he endured for us. And pray also that we might have the courage and the strength to make the most of our times of adversity, thinking first of others when we are most in need. Pray for the time when your world falls out from under your feet. Pray that you will have the

courage and strength to love others and witness to Jesus in that dark hour, showing those dearest to you what is most important in life.