



## **John 18:15–18**

15 Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, 16 but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant-girl on duty there and brought Peter in. 17 'You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?' she asked Peter. He replied, 'I am

not.’ 18 It was cold, and the servants and officials stood round a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

## **Reflection**

One of the saddest and darkest sections of Scripture continues in today’s passage from the middle of John 18. It is dark and cold. Jesus cuts a lonely figure, his hands tied behind his back, being pushed and prodded in the direction of Jerusalem. He is all alone as he is escorted by a column of impassive Roman guards carrying torches and lanterns and clubs. The chief priest’s officials who had accompanied the arrest can barely wipe the smiles off their faces, except Malchus, the chief

priest's servant who keeps stealing glances at Jesus. There's still blood on his tunic from his severed ear that Jesus had made whole again. No doubt many in the arresting party were reliving the supernatural force that had pinned them to the ground moments earlier, and the miraculous healing they had witnessed as they marvelled at the composure of Jesus and the nobility of his surrender. Far from arresting Jesus against his will, as crazy as it seems, it's like they were arresting him according to his will. 'But surely, he knows that he is a dead man walking? And yet, he told his followers not to fight, told them to sheathe their swords before they fled into the night and left him all alone. And for one of them to have betrayed him with a kiss! That must have hurt. Where was their loyalty to their leader?'

Their brooding is interrupted as the bright lights of the temple precincts wake them out of their reverie. Their commission is fulfilled, they deliver their prisoner to An-nas and Caiaphas the high priest, in his high priestly compound. The story continues in today's passage reading from John 18:15–18,

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of this man's disciples too, are you?' she asked Peter. He replied, 'I am not.' 18 It was cold, and the servants and officials stood round a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

Peter is having the worst night of his life. His faith, his life, his identity, his whole world has been turned on its head in the space a few hours. He's in turmoil. Talk of betrayal and Jesus being taken from them had led Peter to swear that all of this would only happen over his dead body – only for his Lord to reply that Peter would deny Jesus three times before morning. Those words had stung, had unnerved him, had shaken his confidence but in the shocking events of the past hour or so they

had been momentarily forgotten. How his blood boiled when he saw Judas identifying Jesus with that kiss! And in a heartbeat his sword was drawn and descending on the high priest's servant – only for Jesus to stop him, not with a look of resignation but a look of command. The tension diffused, the full reality of what he'd just done – drawn a sword on a cohort of Roman soldiers – struck Peter and the other disciples with full force. They'd fled, like cowards, they struck the shepherd and the sheep had scattered just like Jesus said they would; only Peter and one other had doubled back and were following Jesus at a distance. But who is this one other?

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Traditionally it has been thought that this other disciple is John. This information only occurs in his account and while it is only conjecture there is some historical evidence to suggest that he may have known in the high priest's household through his father's fishing business, perhaps supplying the high priest's table. The details of John's narrative also read like an eyewitness account, including unnecessary detail in the Greek that the fire was a charcoal fire. Either way, Peter is led by this

disciple out of the frying pan and into the fire. But the heat very quickly proves too much for him.

‘You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?’ she asked Peter. He replied, ‘I am not.’

Two trials are going on. Inside the compound, Jesus is being put on trial by the most senior religious figure in the land. In the courtyard outside, Peter is put on trial by the servant-girl on duty at the gate. Jesus had pinned two hundred soldiers to the ground with his response, ‘I am he’. All that Peter can manage to this young servant girl’s charge is ‘I am not’. Because Peter is very much not Jesus. And as these two trials play out, we’ll see that there could not be any greater distance between Je-



Jesus Christ and the leader of his disciples on earth.

## **Think & Pray**

But for this morning consider the scene before us and in particular the character of Peter. Real life is never one-dimensional. Peter's situation is complex and tragic. He loves Jesus more than life and has promised him that he will lay down his life before seeing him arrested. Jesus then told him that quite to the contrary, Peter would disown him three times. In the stress of the moment these words are forgotten and in a heartbeat Peter is charging, sword in hand, at a company of Roman soldiers trying to stop Jesus' arrest. But Jesus stops him and saves him from them. Peter flees but then moments later walks headlong

again into the lion's den. He bravely shares a fire with the enemy but then loses his nerve when challenged by a little girl. What are we to make of this vacillation? What are we to make of this war going on in Peter's soul and his conflicted responses to the nightmare that is unfolding around him? What lessons are there from Peter's initial pride in making a promise to Jesus that he could not keep? Or in his failure to 'watch and pray' in the Garden so that he might be kept from temptation? Or in the painful influence that fear holds over him in this moment of shame?

I think all of this is to show us that even the great Apostle Peter was in just as great a need of what Jesus was about to do as every single one of us. The leader of the disciples, the one on whom Jesus would

build his church is about to fail utterly, bitterly and shamefully right at the hour of Christ's triumph; and never more clearly will it be seen the difference between even the greatest amongst us and matchless worth of Jesus Christ. Peter, like us all, simply cannot do this in his own strength no matter the promises he'd made to Jesus. He needs a saviour too. And Jesus will come to him in his weakness and failure and save him and turn his weakness into strength by his grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps you've been brought low recently. You thought you had it all together but it's all fallen apart. People look up to and rely on you like they did Peter and you feel like you're failing them because you can't hold it all together and don't know what

to do. Perhaps you've let down someone you love dearly. It may well be that today as you read these words you are at your lowest ebb. Sometimes it takes moments like these to understand our complete and utter dependence on Jesus. We can't do this thing called life in our own strength. We need him. We can't carry the whole world on our shoulders, that's why he did.

Express to him this morning how much you love him and how much you depend on him for everything. Remember this morning in prayer the trial he went through for you even as you weather whatever trial it is that life is currently visiting on you. If your faith is weak, if you've sinned and made mistakes, if you feel you've let your family, friends and Lord down because of these events that threaten to overwhelm

you, think of the grace that Jesus extends to Peter. Think of the forgiveness. Think of what Peter goes on to become in response to the cross and through the gift of the Holy Spirit. That same grace is yours in Jesus. And just as Jesus prayed that Peter would not succumb he is also praying for you right now and carrying you through this storm.