



## **Mark 14:53–54**

53 They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. 54 Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

### **Reflection**

In the dead of the night, a large crowd armed with swords and clubs escort an unarmed man down the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley and into Jerusalem. It's now in the early hours of Friday morning. Chief priests, elders, body guards, temple police, Romans soldiers and a traitor make up this veritable army, sent to arrest an unarmed man praying in a garden late at night. The eleven men with the man had been asleep. One of them, after starting awake, pulled a sword and lashed out wildly at the nearest person. His name was Malchus, one of the servants of the high priest, perhaps a body guard. The one with the sword had nearly killed him, and started a hopelessly one-side battle. Until the unarmed man who was the object of this whole commotion commanded him to stop. He stopped. In

fact, everyone stopped and stared as the man who spoke with such authority then demonstrated his authority by miraculously healing his enemy with a touch. He then handed himself over to be arrested as his followers fled into the night. They weren't pursued. They had what they'd come for.

In uneasy silence the procession heads back to Jerusalem. The chief priests and elders are confident enough, scheming how they might bring this whole matter to a swift and fatal end. But the soldiers and servants aren't so sure. Such calmness and authority in the face of battle marked this man as one of unusual calibre. It was like he'd known that they were coming, and even now he carried himself with such a presence that it was almost as if he was the one leading them back to Jerusalem.

And this isn't even to speak of the way he'd reached out and touched the blood streaming down the side of Malchus' face only to remove his hand and his ear be completely restored. There was plenty to brood over on their way back to Jerusalem. But perhaps, most disconcerting of all were the man's words. When he'd said, in Matthew's version of these events

‘Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?’ Matt 26:53

the look in his eye and the tone in his voice said that he meant it. And despite themselves, they'd felt fear. Many of them had heard him in the temple courts earlier in the week, some even remembered him

teaching at previous Passover festivals. No-one ever spoke like this man.

And then when he went on to point out how cowardly the whole arrest was. He was right. There is shame in this act. There is shame in arresting an unarmed man without a charge in the dead of the night. And shame in this talk of a midnight trial, not in the temple courts, but in the high priest's personal residence.

Which of course is where they take Jesus in verse 53 of our passage today,

53 They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together.

Word has been urgently sent to members of the Sanhedrin, servants rapping on doors late at night. They're waking up members of the Jewish ruling council with 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. So close to the Passover festival that started at sun down on Friday evening, they had to act fast. And so in various states of dishevelment and haste, the teachers of the law and elders gathered (we read in the other gospel versions) at Caiaphas' house. Not all of them, but a representative body. Others were still haranguing potential witnesses, trying to cobble together a case that might convict Jesus. While they were very happy at this turn of events, the whole thing had been

quite suddenly dropped in their lap. They were unprepared and time was of the essence because it was against the law for anyone to be executed during the Passover festival.

And so the scene shifts from the Garden of Gethsemane to Caiaphas' palace. And from one villain to another. From Judas Iscariot to Joseph Caiaphas. From the traitor of the son of God to the traitor of the Jewish people. From the one who'd sold his soul to the devil for thirty pieces of silver to the one who'd sold out his faith for power and influence given to him by the Romans. The office of high priest over God's people extends back to the time of Moses and Aaron. However, under the Romans the position had become more political than it was religious. The high priest was ap-

pointed by ruling power, the Romans, and acted as the chief representative of the Jewish nation under their rule. Caiaphas was appointed by them in AD 18. And as a testament to his political skill and his acceptability to the Roman prefects, 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. It is into the hands of this political serpent that Jesus is now handed over, and to a hastily convened trial held in his house.

Peter too is about to undergo a trial of his own. Jesus will be put on trial by Caiaphas in his palace. Peter will be put on trial by servant girls in the courtyard outside. Mark introduces the subplot of Peter's trial in



verse 54,

54 Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

Peter was brave, if foolish, at Jesus' arrest. Then, like a coward he fled off into the bushes. Here we find him somewhere in between. Bravely, he's walked right into the lion's den and sat down with the servants and guards. But he hasn't come to do anything, Matthew's version simply says he's come to 'see the outcome.' And of course we'll follow very closely the outcome of both Jesus' trial, and his, over the coming days.

**Think & Pray**

But for now I'd like you to take some time to think back over our passage. Four men. Think about them. Judas, Caiaphas, Jesus and Peter. Two of them have betrayed their God, lured away by wealth and status. Two of them are under extreme pressure to renounce the faith.

Judas and Caiaphas. How could these two men go so wrong? One was a disciple of Jesus himself. The other held the most esteemed office in all of Judaism. And here they are conspiring to put to death the son of God. For one it was the money. For the other Jesus represented a threat to his power and status, his comfortable way of life. In the cold light of day we need to ask similar questions of ourselves. Are you in control of your money or does your money

control you? Is your faith in Jesus becoming a threat to your comfortable life? What are you going to do? Changes like those that happened in Judas and Caiaphas aren't sudden. They're incremental, little by little, often barely perceptible; sin's like that, until Satan takes everything away. What's your weakness? What's Satan working on in your life?

And then there's Jesus and Peter. Christians under pressure. Christians on trial. Perhaps you're going through a trial right now. If so, it's worth watching them closely over the coming days. One's going to resist and die, the other fail and live. There'll be joy, pain, bitter regret, and deep repentance. One prayed and was carried through. The other didn't and was caught unprepared.

Turn these four men over in your mind this morning and then close this time in prayer as you are led by the Holy Spirit.