



Trials and Denials

John 18:12-27

- 1. Trial (verses 12-14)**
- 2. Denial (verses 15-18)**
- 3. Trial (verses 19-24)**
- 4. Denial (verses 25-27)**

In most good books and movies, the focus of our attention moves from scene to scene, often developing different portions of the story in different places, with different people, showing contrast between the two, as the story develops.

Let's take some well-known movies, especially to the children.

For instance, in *Mary Poppins*, the scenes shift from Mr. Banks at work, to his detached children. At the bank, Mr. Banks is stable and successful. But at home, his lack of leadership is showing up in the waywardness of his children. It takes Mary Poppins to come in and save the day as she is filled with adventure, unlike the rigidity of their father, who can't fathom wasting money by feeding the birds. Eventually, the joy of Mary Poppins spills over to Mr. Banks, who learns to live and laugh, and so is united with his children. That's the movie of *Mary Poppins*. It's filled with the contrast of these two approaches to life, and eventually, the way of Mary Poppins wins the day.

Let's take another well-known children's film, *Finding Nemo*. The movie is about two clownfish. You have an overprotective dad, Marlon. You have a disobedient son, Nemo. The son, Nemo, is captured alive by some fishermen, who bring him across the ocean to a fish tank in a dentist's office in Sydney. The father, Marlon, crosses the ocean to rescue his son and re-unite. Throughout the movie, the scenes are constantly shifting back and forth, from father to son, until father and son are united.

This is how movies and books often work. Different scenes, telling their own

stories, and converging at last in the ending. Well, this morning, as we come to our text in John 18, we will encounter two scenes, in two different places, each telling different stories. On the one hand, we will see Jesus standing before the religious leaders of his day, facing an unjust trial, standing strong and tall, as he awaits the sentence of death. On the other hand, we will see Peter in the courtyard, watching the scene unfold, cowering to those around the fire, failing to profess the name of Jesus.

I think that right here is the point that John is making. You have the strong Jesus, who is faithful unto death, and you have weak Peter, who won't even profess Jesus to a servant girl. These same stories are told in the other gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each tell the story of Jesus at the unjust trial, each tell the story of Peter denying that he is a disciple of Christ. But only in the gospel of John do we see the scenes change, going back and forth between Jesus on trial and Peter's denials. I think that this is the point in John's gospel. He is working hard to draw the contrast between faithful Jesus and faithless Peter.

It's a clear lesson for us today: not to trust in your own strength, but to trust in the strength of Jesus. Of all of the disciples, Peter is the strongest of them all. Of all of the disciples, Peter has stepped out to make the boldest assertions of his willingness to follow Jesus. Do you remember the conversation between Peter and Jesus in the upper room?

John 13:36-38

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."

Our text today proves Jesus right and Peter wrong! Our text shows us what it is to follow Jesus. It means that we ought not to trust in our own resolve, but to trust in Jesus, the one who will stand strong on our behalf. This is the heart of the gospel. We aren't saved by our zeal and love for God. Truth be known, this will fail. Rather, we are saved through the work of Jesus, who never failed, even when facing some of the most difficult of times, which we will see today in our text.

So, if you haven't done so already, I invite you to open in your Bibles to John, chapter 18. I want to read John 18:12-27. Now, if you remember from a few weeks

ago, chapter 18 began with Judas leading "a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees" (verse 2) to come and arrest Jesus in the garden. As the scene unfolded, Jesus stepped forward to make sure that only he was arrested on that day. In doing so, he shielded his disciples from arrest, saying, "If you seek me, let these men go" (John 18:8). That's exactly what the crowd did. They arrested Jesus, but let the disciples go free. This is where we pick up the story in verse 12.

John 18:12-27

So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. 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. 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 hand, 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.

There are four scenes in this passage. The first comes in the first three verses. Here, we see the trial of Jesus. He is brought before Annas, the high priest. The next scene comes in verses 15-18. Here we see a denial. Peter denies that he is a disciple of Jesus. Then, in verses 19-24, we have the trial of Jesus continued. Then, in verses 25-27, we see another denial of Peter. Thus, the title of my message this morning is, "Trials and Denials."

So, let's look at our first "trial."

1. Trial (verses 12-14)

John 18:12-14

So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. 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.

Now in verse 12, we see Jesus being taken away. He is taken away to Annas (verse 13), the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Now, in verse 19, Annas himself is identified as "the high priest." Then, in verse 24, we see Annas sending Jesus away to Caiaphas the high priest.

This all may sound confusing to us. But like many things in the Bible, it's only confusing to us. I don't think that John was confused. I don't think that those in John's day were confused. Apparently, somehow, both of these men were "high priests." I think that the best explanation is that Caiaphas was the official "high priest" of the year. But Annas, the father-in-law, was somehow the patriarch of this high-priestly family. Perhaps he was the "high priest emeritus," the one of influence, the one to whom Jesus was sent first.

Anyway, we don't need to spend our time there. But we do need to spend our time on verse 14.

John 18:14

It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

This is a reference back to chapter 11, shortly after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. If you remember, Lazarus had been dead for four days, but Jesus stood before the tomb, told the people to "take away the stone" (John 11:39), and then cried out, in front of the crowd that was there, "Lazarus, come out" (Luke 11:43). Lazarus came out of the tomb, alive. As a result,

John 11:45-46

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

This was a great problem for the chief priests and the Pharisees. For they reasoned with each other,

John 11:47-48

"What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

They didn't deny that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Rather, they were fearful that Jesus would continue on to do other amazing signs, and that still more would follow after Jesus, and that Jesus would become a revolutionary of a political movement. This would bring the Romans into the picture, who would squash the rebellion, and take away the power from the Jewish leaders.

The council didn't know what to do.

John 11:49-50

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."

Caiaphas meant that it was better to kill one man, Jesus, so that he wouldn't be the leader of a movement, that the Romans would come and suppress the people, which would be bad for the Jewish nation. But in saying these things, Caiaphas was actually preaching the gospel! That one man would die for the people. This is exactly what Jesus did upon the cross. He died "for the people." He died for us,

that we might not die. He died in our place, to bear the punishment that our sins deserve. By faith, we can know and experience forgiveness of sins, and have eternal life with Jesus. Jesus said,

John 11:25

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."

There is life in Jesus, the one who died for the sins of those who believe and trust in him. This again points us back to the purpose of John in writing this gospel, that we would believe in Jesus, and find our sins forgiven in him! Let's say it again. Let's remind ourselves of why John wrote his gospel: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). May we believe in Jesus, that we might live!

Anyway, John mentions here in verse 14 about Caiaphas, who said these things, to indicate the sort of trial that Jesus was facing. Jesus was facing a biased judge, who wanted to see Jesus die, and would do everything possible to see this happen, which we shall see over the next few weeks.

OK, let's move on. We have seen the beginnings of the trial of Jesus. Let's look now at the denial of Peter.

2. Denial (verses 15-18)

John 18:15-18

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.

Remember, this is the same Peter who said, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you" (John 13:37).

John 18:15

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple.

So, picture the scene. Jesus was arrested and carried away to the court of the high priest. Peter and "another disciple" followed Jesus there. We don't know exactly who this disciple was, but the traditional interpretation is that it was John himself. It doesn't really matter. But this other disciple had connections with the high priest, so he was able to enter with Jesus into the courtyard. But Peter was detained at the door. This is what we read in verse 15,

John 18:15

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.

At this point, this other disciple left Jesus to continue on to get Peter into the courtyard. I can envision him speaking with some people, "Here's my friend. He's with me. Can he come in?" Eventually, he worked it out so that Peter could join him in the courtyard. John describes the scene in verse 16, "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."

It's at that moment that Peter was confronted by the servant girl. "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.'" Then, he continued on into the courtyard. I'm sure that this interaction was quick. I'm not sure Peter even realized what he had said or done. It's sort of like there is security involved. Peter knew that it was only because of a favor that he was passing the door. He just said what he thought he had to say in order to get in.

But it was a denial nonetheless. It was the first of the three denials that Jesus had predicted earlier. "Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times" (John 13:38). I just say this, how quickly life passes us by, and we miss opportunities to stand up for Jesus, and to profess that you are a follower of Jesus.

Perhaps there's that dirty joke that is told at the office. Rather than being stone-faced, you laugh with the guys. Basically, you are saying, "Not me! I'm not a disciple of Jesus." Perhaps you meet somebody for the first time, and they begin asking you about your life and your family and your interests, and you say nothing about Jesus. Basically, you are saying, "Not me! I'm not a disciple of Jesus." Perhaps you are talking with a neighbor, who uses colorful language, and to fit in and seek peace, you drop a few words yourself. Basically, you are saying, "Not me! I'm not a disciple of Jesus."

All of these things can come so fast at you, that you barely realize all of the ways that you deny Jesus, and are like Peter. I'm not even sure that Peter realized himself what he did. But he got into the courtyard and found himself with the other servants. Verse 18, "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."

Then the scene shifts back again to the trial.

3. Trial (verses 19-24)

John 18:19-24

The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. 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 hand, 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.

Verse 19, "The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching." Again, remember that Jesus is not standing before an impartial judge. Jesus is standing before a man who wants him dead. So, this questioning is more like an interrogation than it is a trial. The high priest is fishing here for information about his disciples and his teaching. He's looking for Jesus to rat on his followers. He's looking for Jesus to incriminate himself, by saying something wrong that they might jump on. John gives us no details here, so we will not speculate on exactly what was said. We do know, however, how Jesus responded to this grilling. Verse

20, "Jesus answered him, 'I have spoken openly to the world. 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.'"

This seems perfectly logical of Jesus to say. "You are digging into what I have said, trying to get some dirt on me. But I haven't hidden anything. If this really is a trial, then let's bring witnesses. Let others testify about what I have taught. Surely, you can hear all about me from others! Why are you not conducting this like a court of law should be conducted?" This angered the court. Verse 22, "When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?'"

From all we can tell, Jesus was respectful in his inquisition. He simply pointed out a better (and more lawful) way to get at the truth of what he taught. "Ask those who heard what he said!" But the court didn't like this. They felt that Jesus was disrespecting the high priest. I love how Mickey Klink points out the irony here. He writes, "The reader knows full well that the question should be immediately reversed and asked of his servant: 'Is that how you treat the true High Priest?'" (p. 750).

Because this is the reality of the situation here in this courtroom. From the human standpoint, it looks like the high priest is conducting a trial, questioning Jesus about his followers and his teaching. But in reality, Jesus is the high priest, who is conducting the trial against the earthly high priest. Jesus is asking the questions: Verse 23, "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?'"

This was too much for the court. Verse 24, "Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest." The trial of Jesus would continue on, before Caiaphas and before Pontius Pilate. Suffice it to say that Jesus hardly received a fair trial while upon the earth, and that's the point. Jesus suffered unjustly for us. He was innocent, yet he was put to death, so that we, who are guilty, may live. This is the good news that Jesus brings! He committed no wrong. Nor was any false word found in his mouth! Yet he suffered as if he had done wrong. He took the suffering that we deserved! We all deserve to die like Jesus died! But he died in our place, that God might not count our sins against us! This is what we are called to believe in the gospel of John.

Then comes another scene change. Verse 25 takes us back again to Peter in the

courtyard. We see his

4. Denial (verses 25-27)

John 18:25-27

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.

Verse 25, "Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself." This takes us back to verse 18, right where we left off with Peter. He was with the other servants and officers standing before the charcoal fire that they had made. It's like a campfire. Peter is blowing into his hands, and extending them to the heat in trying to keep warm. We get a similar scene. Verse 25, "So they said to him, 'You also are not one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.'"

Peter was asked almost the identical question as before (in verse 17), and Peter responded the same way, "I am not." Now, I didn't mention this before, but in the context of the gospel of John, the way that Peter answers is truly significant. If you remember, the gospel of John records a bunch of sayings of Jesus: "I am the bread of life." "I am the light of the world." "I am the door." "I am the good shepherd." "I am the resurrection and the life." "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "I am the vine." There are occasions when Jesus simply says, "I am." To the woman at the well who was asking about the Messiah, Jesus said, "I am." To the Jews who were questioning his relationship to Abraham said, "Before Abraham was, I am." When they came to arrest Jesus, saying they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus said, "I am."

Here, Peter says what we all should say, "I am not!" If the gospel of John teaches you anything, it ought to teach you this. Jesus "is." I "am not." This is the message of the entire text today. We see the faithfulness of Jesus, standing up to the high priest with dignity and respect, yet facing injustice. We see the faithlessness of Peter, whimpering to the questions of those by the charcoal fire, denying Jesus. Peter speaks the truth. "He is the 'I am.'" "I am the 'I am not.'" But in doing so, Peter denied the Lord Jesus. For this, now the second time.

We read the third time in verse 26, "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." This proves Jesus right and Peter wrong! Jesus said, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times" (John 13:38). This begs for us to consider our own lives.

This morning, I want to finish with a few thoughts.

First of all, we're all like Peter. We might think that we're strong. We're not. We're weak. Our hope, by the way, should not be in our own zeal, our own righteousness, our own promises, our own decisions, our own standing. How many promises have you made in your Christian life? You said, "I'm going to do this or that. I'm going to read through the whole Bible this year. Or I'm going to pray for so long every day this year. Or I'm going to read these books. Or I'm going to share my faith every day." You make all these promises, and how many of those promises have you failed to keep? That's not the way to live the Christian life. We don't live out of your own zeal or righteousness or your own push or your own diligence. Our hope is in the Lord, as we read in prayer meeting this morning, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Psalm 86:15). In our weakness, we turn to him to be gracious to us and strengthen us and save us. That's where our hope is. So hope in Jesus, not in your own strength to stand firm, because truth be known, we're all weak.

Another thought. Just realize the severity of what it means to deny Jesus. We can look at what Peter did and seek to brush it off. But his sin of denial was very serious. Jesus, "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in glory" (Luke 9:26). Are you ashamed of the words of Jesus? Jesus says, "I will be ashamed of you if you are ashamed of me." Just realize it's a deep thing to deny the Lord. Peter's denials were big and deep. Peter knew this. In Matthew's gospel, we read that Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75).

But even in this there is hope. At the end of the Gospel of John, we're going to see Peter restored. The resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples and had breakfast with them. After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Feed my lambs. ... Tend my sheep. ... Feed my sheep." In other words, Jesus was reinstating Peter for the work of shepherding the church. Peter became the chief spokesman among all of the disciples.

So if you're ashamed of Jesus and his words, then repent like Peter did. Turn and

trust the Lord, saying, "I have failed. I have denied you before men. Forgive me. Strengthen me that I might be bold before others and might not deny you.

Final thought. I've already talked about denying the Lord in a quick way, like Peter did that first time. But I want for you to consider the second and third denials of Peter. After the first denial, he had some time to think about it. I want for you to think about the ways in which you can deny the Lord after some thought. Perhaps there are those in your life who have known you for a long time, but you've never told them about your faith in Jesus. Maybe you haven't denied Jesus, but you haven't really affirmed him either. I think that's a subtle way of denying Jesus. Maybe you know that if I bring up Jesus, your friendship might be rifted and it might be a problem.

Or maybe there's some things in your lifestyle you're denying the Lord. It may not be with your words. But it may be with your actions that you deny him often. This may come by choosing material things in the world rather than the kingdom values that Jesus calls us to. Maybe there are sins in your life that you're holding on to, that you're not repenting from or turning from. This can be a form of denying the Lord. Maybe things that come out of your mouth that shouldn't come out of your mouth. Maybe you fear the praise of men. Maybe you're afraid to stand out to make some sort of profession because you know what other people are going to say to you.

In all of these things, I just encourage you to trust in Jesus. If Peter can be restored, you can be restored. But realize you're not going to do it on your own strength. Peter on his own strength fell. But seeking the Lord, he'll strengthen you for everything that he would have for you.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 15, 2026 by
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