

John 18:13–27

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[0 : 00] Again, the scripture reading is taken from John's Gospel, chapter 18, verses 13 through 27. Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word.

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 court 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 are not one of this man's disciples also, 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.

[1 : 07] 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 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?

[2 : 16] Peter again denied it. And at once a rooster crowed. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You can be seated. I want to welcome you this morning.

Those of you who are here in the loft and those who are at your home or gathered in different parks or backyards around the country, around our city.

We are thrilled that you're here today as we continue in our series through the Gospel of John. If I had to tag today's sermon with a title, it would simply be, Can I Get a Witness?

Can I Get a Witness? Our Heavenly Father, I now pray that you would hide me behind your cross, that we would see only Jesus and what should be said of him.

We pray that our testimony concerning him would be strengthened as we see what those are testifying about him in this text.

[3 : 36] And may it be for the glory of your name and the good of your church. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, I wonder, on a light note, how you would respond if I were to ask you which you prefer, salts or sweets?

Onion rings or ice cream? Generally, individuals have an inbuilt disposition for one or the others. In fact, though, there are those who say, I can never make up my mind. I like my salt to follow my sweet. And once I have my sweets, I want some salt.

Well, let me tell you, the text that is set before us, like somebody putting a plate in front of you with four distinct items on it, seems to go back and forth between salt and sweet.

Salt as it is and bittersweet. I hope you have the text in front of you. These verses are interesting, even in their construction, and they have caused questions in regard to why they are arranged as they are.

[5 : 01] Four paragraphs. Four gathered words to taste. The first places us with the ironic witness or testimony in the house of Annas from Caiaphas.

It's an ironic witness. The second, though, will take you to Peter, and you'll be plunged into his compromised testimony.

Followed then back into the world of Annas and what would really be a suppression of witness, and then landing finally in the barnyard, no less, with a rooster who will crow and vindicate what we know of Jesus.

I suppose you could look at it in that complicated way, this movement from one scene to another, a third scene to a fourth, but in reality it's a comparison of two leading representatives and what they have to say about Jesus.

Annas and Caiaphas on one hand and Peter on another, and those testimonies roll over on themselves in two cycles necessary because we lose things if we only had the first, and the full weight of all things would not be had if we did not have both.

[6 : 40] So let's take a look. What do these paragraphs, or these two parts, have to say concerning a witness?

Indeed, both of them have in common the fact that they are bearing witness, and that witness ought to inform us. The ironic witness of Caiaphas.

It's really right there in 12 through 14. He's now arrested, led before Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, and it is Caiaphas, a Jewish political leader that actually bears witness of Jesus that it would be expedient that one man should die for the country.

I don't know if you know much about Judaism in the first century, but Annas was in a sense the leading long-term figure, political figure within the house of Israel.

He was a high priest for decades, unlike any other high priest before or after him. In fact, five of his sons served as high priest at different times, and here, Caiaphas, his son-in-law, is presently serving at the time of Christ's crucifixion as high priest.

[8 : 09] He is the godfather of political clout in Israel for Judaism. He is, Caiaphas is the one who, in a sense, married into Camelot.

And he bears witness concerning Jesus. Notice the key word there in verse 14. It would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

If you're not familiar with the book of John, you ought to roll backwards a bit into chapter 11, and you'll see in verse 49 and following that upon the raising of Lazarus from the dead, there was a great stir among the political leadership in Israel, and they began to think that all people would begin to follow Christ.

Notice verse 48. And that the Romans would take away our place and our nation. But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said, Nor do you know nothing at all, nor understand that it is better that one man should die for the people than the whole nation should perish.

He didn't say this on his own accord, but being high priest that year, he had prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation also, but also to gather in to one, the children of God who are scattered abroad.

[9 : 35] Here he is, Caiaphas, unconsciously, unwittingly, unknowingly, prophesying that Jesus' life would be taken for the welfare of the nation, and that the unrest would be quelled, and they, Caiaphas and his family and those like him, would retain their seat of power.

As intermediaries, before the people and the Roman world. Let me just see if I can put it like this then.

He is among those, salt, he is among those who are refusing Jesus, but making use of Jesus to ensure that power is retained in light of Jesus.

Let me see if I can bring this truth of this first taste to our palate. To be counted among those who refuse Jesus does not mean that you are unwilling to speak up for Jesus.

Caiaphas did. Let me put it in our terms, because it's an election year in our country if you're watching from the states today, and all things are by nature politicized in such a year, and in such a horrific year as this, even more so.

[11 : 09] But let the church remember that politicians will gain power in the world or secure the power they have by the world by making use of Jesus.

It's just true. His name will be brought up many times in the coming days. Men and women, national and local elections will solicit your vote through the name of Christ in order to secure their place.

Let me be more clear. They will confess his name to advance their cause. Let me be even more clear.

They will proclaim some, willingly, substitutionary atonement. You will hear references about Jesus who laid down his life for another.

if it will procure your loyalty. They are not afraid to utter the name of Christ in pursuit of their understanding of national unity.

[12:27] And in the midst of all this, the tragedy, now me, approaching my 60s, the older man among us, the tragedy is the church goes for it every time.

It doesn't matter whether it's coming from the left or the right. And let me say this, as you work your way clear in a year where the name of Christ will secure the power of others in our country.

If the church is to speak truth to power as it must, then it must be able to speak truth to whoever is in power.

And this is where the church over the last 40 years continues to lose its way. In such adherence and alignment, we're seeing the divide in our country within Christian faith.

All well-intentioned efforts to make massive change, or from the standpoint of others, their well-intended efforts to ensure status quo in all things without a full recognition that the only ability the church has in the coming days to speak truth to power is to ensure our ability to speak truth to whoever is in power, and in some sense to know our mission and our mindset and what Christ would have us do, to be actively engaged, to be in the world but not of the world.

[14:20] This indeed is our calling. What's the world see though? What actually is happening if there are those in this first paragraph who are bearing witness to Jesus by way of irony to retain power?

Look what Peter does in the coming paragraph. He is more than willing to compromise his witness if it will just give him access to the room where powerful decisions are made.

Fascinating to me what Peter does here, this ardent disciple, this firm faith-filled follower, not one who is refusing Jesus but one who is actively seeking to follow Jesus yet his witness while not trying to secure power in the world is compromised so that he would have personal protection from the world.

I mean that's what happens. Simon Peter follows Jesus verse 15 and so did another disciple and since that disciple was known to the high priest he entered into the courtyard but Peter was outside we have no idea who the other disciple was.

Some think John some think it could just be someone who was known it doesn't really matter who it is Peter did not have access to the room and someone speaks up for him but the one who comes to the door a servant girl who kept watch there brought him in and said to him on his entrance are also you not one of this man's disciples are you and he said I am not.

[16:10] See this is the compromised witness of one who is actively seeking to follow Christ. Now get for your own life what this means in this first movement of the text while the world is speaking of Jesus to gain power Peter speaks out against Jesus for not only his protection but for a place of position.

He's willing to actually bear witness falsely. I find it interesting.

He was bold in his assertions in private. You remember earlier in the gospel Peter had said while everyone else is going their way I'm there to the end.

In fact on this same night just an hour or so before he had taken out a sword and was willing to take off the head of any leadership that would displace Jesus from the world and yet that man in that strength with those assertions when push comes to shove was able to deny him simply.

Bold assertions followed by timid denials a private walking followed by a public falling and as it is for Peter come on just look at yourself as it was for Peter so is it not so often for us well intentioned but wanting in execution spirit willing but flesh weak people of faith actively following but often failing one doesn't really need to look at the world with all of its false proclamations of our Lord to condemn it we just have to be willing to search within our own soul for all those opportunities that were given but compromised at one sense you would think that the cycle would almost be complete

[18:51] I mean what more do we need from the text in fact the other three gospels don't go on with what follows in other words you got enough to know what you need to know concerning a witness for Christ the world will make use of him his own followers will not be able to accurately follow him and therefore he will here for you and me in 19 through 27 why does the cycle repeat itself notice verses 19 to 24 the ironic witness of

Caiaphas in that first movement is replaced with the inhibiting of witnesses! by Annas that's really what goes on here there there is a suppression of testimony on Jesus in other words not only is the world willing to speak about Jesus when it will serve their ends the world is willing to put down speech on Jesus if it will serve their ends the key is there in the two questions that Jesus asks verse 21 why are you asking me or verse 23 why do you strike me see Jesus is responding to the high priest questioning of himself and he's the defendant in Jewish law and in practice the defendant was not the first one on the stand it was required that there would be witnesses to speak both for and against the rule of law the accompaniment of at least two witnesses that would have something to say but what

Jesus finds himself in the midst of is the high priest verse 19 is asking him about what he does and Jesus says look I've spoken openly to the world I've always taught in the synagogues I've always been in the temple where all the Jews are company I have nothing to say have heard of me in other words he's saying if I'm on trial work in accordance with your rules and of course the official in charge saw what was happening there and realized that Jesus was softly subtly with great ingenuity pressing the bar in the courtroom and he is therefore struck to which Jesus says verse 23 if what I have said is wrong bear witness about wrong but if what

I have said is right why do you strike me in other words he's saying can I get a witness and this unit this moment the additional material that we have indicates that those who have power not only make use of Jesus to their own ends testimony of Jesus to its own ends this is the way it is and the church needs to be aware the irony there of course is that sad line the way it falls in verse 21 ask those who have heard of me what I said to them they know what I said and if you're a careful reader of the text you know that Peter himself is within earshot of this word and not only was he willing in the first unit to be compromised in his testimony that he might have a place at the table here he is complicit through his silence once at the table this is interesting to me followers of

Christ are tempted to be silent in such a day as this to be suppressed to be without speech here he needed a bold witness and here just as our witness is often compromised so it is also complicit through our silence let me put it to you as clearly as I can many within the church fail to speak the name of Jesus when it actually matters when there is something in play and it concerns him and his kingdom and his way and his rule and we have heard and his voice we know and yet we stand silent in fact

[24 : 55] Peter not only stands silent the text really that just continues to roll that contradictory testimony continues to move forward in compromised fashion for 25 without any iteration begins to continue to say Peter was standing and warming himself that's often what the church does as well not only do we fail in speaking accurately concerning Jesus but often times we're just silent warming ourselves by the fire when we should be speaking for Jesus so they say to him are you also not one of them are you let me give you another shot he denied it I'm 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 the church is often stuck standing there warming ourselves by the fire more than willing to compromise our witness concerning our allegiance to

Christ both by what we say and by what we do not say so is there any hope let me come back to my tag on the sermon can I get a witness is there something beyond an ironic witness of politicized power is there any hope beyond a compromised and complicit witness of the church is there any vindication is there anything to be said on this day from this text absolutely it's where the entire text has been going toward when the world speaks falsely and the church fails in its frailty go to the farm and you hear the sound of a rooster and at once my text closes a rooster crowed the compromised witness of the church is overrun by the intrusive call of the rooster this is stunning he has brought you under the hearing of the word today for the purpose of listening to a farm animal whose sound at that moment vindicates what vindicates the very word of our

Lord what an irony what an irony have you ever seen a text like this where the bookends are so clear it highlights the sense that while Caiaphas is conniving in his use of Jesus and while the other end we have the cock crowing in a vindication of Jesus and within it we have Peter cowering for cover and protection in light of Jesus this is to me the most stunning thing of this text in regard to contemporary terms because while the world is in the state that it is and while the church is in the condition that she is we are not without hope before God will have witness to himself in the world he will get a witness even from the rooster who crows finally there is one in the world willing to tell it like it is what a passage of judgment on the world conviction upon the church

I can't help but finish this thing out today by talking about the need for forgiveness to address the fact not so much by way of emphasis this morning that I have something to say about the witness of those who are refusing Jesus but I have something I want to say to those who are actively trying to follow Jesus and continuing to fail both by what we do and don't do say and don't say sin and then habitually sin that's what Peter is caught in but for the Christian there's not to be this habitual movement away from the call of Christ the church is to be the church which means that we need hope and the hope is not going to come from within ourselves people it's not within us your disposition towards salt or sweet from what

I understand and I'm no doctor nor studying to be one is in some sense a condition of heredity and there's a genetic makeup to it so too your ability to have a taste a desire to be full on for Jesus can never be had from your own heredity your own natural makeup your own life experience we all fall short we're all limited in our exposure we all see things through our own lens we have no ability as the followers of Christ to bear witness in the way we should before the world or to say the things that should be said in light of our life in the world and so Peter and you and me Christ church we need forgiveness we actually need

[31 : 34] Jesus to complete what this passage leaves incompleated we need him to die for our sins not as an expedience to our power or in ways that would secure our own position or protect me from my own past but we need him to die for sin that we would be made right with God that we won't speak falsely or with frailty or with complicity but truth I'm a sinner saved by grace and the only power I have to live rightly in this world in this day in this hour is going to be through the empowering of the Holy Spirit where the lips and the tastes of my Lord become my own where I'm remade has that ever happened for you do you know forgiveness you know if you keep following us over the next few weeks this threefold habitual pattern is going to be broken in chapter 21 with this threefold word of forgiveness and restoration and restitution

Jesus is going to die that satisfaction might be made for Peter's sin and yours and mine and ours and then Jesus is going to return right away and say to him Peter you love me now you love me on the back side he's going to say yes Lord you know I love you you know I want to actively follow you I've never been one who's wanted to refuse you and he says well then feed my lambs you love me tend my sheep you love me oh Lord you know I want to do what's right and I know that for Christ church black white Asian Hispanic spread out across this city even present in this room I know what you want and it can be had in the power of the forgiveness that comes to us in Christ let me let me get a witness to that the book of

Micah foresaw it and if you can't speak to it the word of God will speak to it and it says in Micah verse 7 rejoice not over me oh my enemy when I fall I shall rise when I sit in darkness the Lord will be a light to me I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me he will bring me out to the light I shall look upon his vindication then my enemy will see and shame will cover her!

this is the testimony of the Lord that we fall but we will rise when!

he pleads our case and executes judgment and that takes you to the foot of the cross dear brothers and sisters in Christ with this world in the state that it is in all of its horror in the church in the condition that she is in in all of her frailty thank God that even so it is well with my soul and how do I know there's a rooster who tells me so our heavenly father we just fall before you as a congregation and a church compromised and complicit sinful and caught in habitual snare seeking our own protection rather than your simple proclamation

[36 : 17] Lord have mercy have mercy on our soul Christ's name amen men