

The Hour has Come - Denial

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Preacher: Warwick Grant

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 6th of March 2005. The preacher is Warwick Grant.

His sermon is entitled The Hour Has Come, Denial, and is based on John 18, verses 15-27. Well, it's an awful thing to contemplate, an awful thing to think about. What would you do if, as a Christian, you were confronted with someone who asked you if you believed and followed the Lord Jesus, knowing that if you said yes, you would be killed.

But if you denied Jesus, your life would be spared. In preparing this sermon today, I put that scenario to myself.

And frankly, faced with that awful moment, I don't know what I'd do. Of course, I'd want to confess my faith in Jesus.

[1 : 13] But would I have the courage to do that, knowing that I would be killed? Friends, this is not a hypothetical situation.

This confronts Christian people in many parts of the world, every day. And we hear incredible stories of bravery in such situations. Paul, our vicar, wrote about some of them in the December edition of Look last year.

Let me read one of them to you. Paul had been visiting Nigeria and he writes, Take the Nigerian Anglican minister I met this year when I was teaching there. His teenage son was asked at gunpoint just a few years ago whether he was a Christian.

He replied unflinchingly that he believed in Jesus Christ. He was killed. Would we have been so courageous?

Well, in the passage we're examining today, we read about the denial of Jesus by Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples and friends. I'd encourage you to follow with me the passage as we examine it.

[2 : 26] You can find it on page 880 of the Black Bibles in the seats. Page 880. It's John's Gospel, chapter 18.

And we kick off at verse 15. Before we get into it, let's ask us and ask God to help us again to understand what we read and to apply it in our lives.

So let's pray. We come before you now, Lord God, our minds filled with worries and concerns. We're very conscious of our responsibilities and commitments.

And as we take some time out this morning from our busy lives, we ask that you would speak to each one of us through your words here in the Bible. Help us to understand.

Help us to be teachable. And give us the courage and will to obey what you require of us. We pray through your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

[3 : 23] Well, let's set the scene. It's the middle of the night. In fact, all of the events in our passage happen at night time, over one evening and early morning the following day.

It is, in fact, the evening before Jesus died. Holy Thursday, it's sometimes called. And the early hours after midnight on Good Friday. Jesus, you probably remember, has just been arrested.

And you might recall that Peter, one of his disciples, had used his sword during the arrest to attack the high priest's servant. And it actually cut off his right ear, we're told.

Jesus had been taken to a bloke whose name was Annas. And Annas had been the Jewish high priest until the occupying Romans had deposed him from that position in about AD 15.

By the current time, it was actually Annas' son-in-law, a guy called Caiaphas, who was the high priest approved of by the Romans. So the Romans approved of this guy as high priest, but most of the Jews still regarded Annas as the real high priest.

[4 : 33] I hope you can follow all that. It sounds confusing, doesn't it? Anyway, it's dark and it's cold and it's late at night. This passage is a bit like one of those TV dramas that moves from one scene to the next scene, so you see what's happening in both places concurrently at the same time.

The first scene is in verse 15, set in the high priest's courtyard, the courtyard of Annas' home, in fact. And you'll notice in verse 15, it says that Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. And most scholars are in agreement that this other disciple was, in fact, John, the writer of this gospel. And we're told that he was known to the high priest. We can't be sure how John the Apostle knew the high priest.

One theory is that because John's dad, a guy called Zebedee, was a fisherman, was wealthy enough to have hired servants, we're told in Mark's gospel. So maybe if John came from a wealthy family, maybe he was able to move in the more higher circles in Jerusalem, maybe even in the priestly circles, the leadership amongst the priests in Jerusalem.

Well, like me, maybe you've always been under the impression that all of Jesus' disciples had basically abandoned Jesus, and Peter was the only one who had the courage to see what was going to happen. But here in verse 15, we're told that John was there as well.

[6 : 06] We're told in verse 15 that John went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. So both John and Peter were hanging around to see what would happen to Jesus.

John had gone in because he was known to the high priest, but Peter was hanging back at the gate, and John paved the way for Peter to join him in the courtyard after speaking to the woman who guarded the gate.

The stage is set for Peter's first denial. You can imagine it, can't you? John speaks to the woman at the gate and gets permission for Peter to come.

So he says, come on, Peter, you're allowed to come in, it's okay. Peter goes through the gate, and as he walks past this woman, she says, you are not also one of this man's disciples, are you? It seems that she already realised that John was one of Jesus' disciples. Her question seems to invite the answer, no. And that's the answer that Peter gives.

[7 : 09] I am not. Peter would have felt quite intimidated. These would have been unfamiliar surroundings to him. Whereas it seems that John was perhaps more familiar with the high priest's house.

I suspect Peter was very, very scared. Don't forget, he actually attacked the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear. And now he's in the high priest's courtyard. I expect he felt very, very vulnerable. It's probably quite late at night by now, perhaps 11pm or later, and quite cold. Peter was by the fire with the others, including the temple officials, called in our version of the Bible the temple police. We often give Peter a hard time because of his denials of Jesus. And to a degree, that's fair enough. But I think he was pretty courageous to hang around as much as he did the high priest's courtyard.

Well, like a TV drama, we now move inside to see how the action is unfolding as Annas questions Jesus. In verse 19, we read that the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.

[8 : 27] Perhaps Annas was concerned that there were so many disciples, they could make a conspiracy of some sort. And maybe he was questioning Jesus about who he claimed to be.

Jesus' response was to explain that his teaching was not a secret thing. It was known to many, many people that he'd spoken to, quite openly and plainly. Jesus said in verse 20, I have spoken openly to the world.

I've always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I've said nothing in secret. That's not to say that Jesus never spoke to his disciples privately.

He did. The Gospels tell us that he did. However, his private teaching to his disciples was simply an elaboration of what he'd said publicly, generally to other people.

Jesus in verse 21 suggests that Annas should be speaking to witnesses who heard Jesus speak, rather than to Jesus himself. You see, in a formal Jewish hearing in the first century, it may have been illegal to question the defendant before you question the witnesses.

[9 : 35] For a case to stand, it needed to rely on the testimony of witnesses, not the defendant. And Annas really here has done the wrong thing in going straight to Jesus to hear what he had to say.

Maybe Jesus, in responding as he did, is actually demanding a fair trial. Maybe Annas regarded this as simply a little fireside chat, not really a legal interrogation.

And so the legal conventions didn't apply as far as he was concerned. Well, John in verse 22 records the first physical assault upon Jesus since his arrest.

We're told that he's hit on the face. The Greek word means a slap with an open hand across his face, supposedly for speaking with rudeness and inappropriate boldness to the high priest.

Well, Annas gets nowhere with Jesus. And so in verse 24, he sends him off to his son-in-law, Caiaphas, the high priest approved of by the Roman authorities.

[10:42] I think it's worth pausing to reflect on this Jewish high priest, this guy called Annas, questioning the heavenly high priest, the Lord Jesus.

There's an irony in this, isn't there? The high priest was the one who was appointed to teach the people and to encourage them to follow God and to look forward to the coming of the Messiah.

And here he is, the Messiah himself, the anointed one standing right in front of him. And Annas would not accept it. The high priest, as well as teaching the people, also performed the annual atonement sacrifice every year for the forgiveness of the people's sins.

And this was a foreshadowing of what God's great high priest, the Lord Jesus himself, would do in dying on the cross for the sins of that people the following day.

It's incredible humility, isn't it? The Lord of the universe, God's high priest, allowing himself to be questioned by an earthly, sinful, purely human high priest who is involved in plotting his death.

[11:55] Of course, Jesus is fully in control of everything that is happening here. We read some of Jesus' words in John chapter 10, verses 17 and 18.

Let me read them to you. Jesus says, No, Jesus wasn't a victim in the sense of being powerless. He was fully in control and willingly gave up his life and took it up again as part of God's plan. Well, we're taken now back to the first scene in our drama, The Fire in the Courtyard.

And the switching of scenes highlights the contrast between Jesus and Peter and their responses to the questions. As someone has written, Jesus stands up to his questioners and denies nothing, while Peter cowers before his questioners and denies everything.

And he does it again in verse 25. Peter was standing and warming himself and they asked him, You are not also one of his disciples, are you? He denied it and said, I am not.

[13:18] I am not trying to excuse Peter, but remember, he must have felt incredibly vulnerable. Not just for the reasons I mentioned earlier, but now probably would have been after midnight, the very, very early hours of Good Friday, maybe two in the morning perhaps.

Peter would have been scared, would have been cold and very tired emotionally and physically as he had not had any sleep. We know how vulnerable we feel.

when we're sleep deprived and those of us with young children probably feel like that right now. In response to any of his questions regarding his affiliation with Jesus, the easiest thing for Peter to do would be just to say, No, I don't know him.

And that's exactly what he does. John also tells us that the final questioner of Peter was one of the slaves of the high priest. This guy was actually related to the guy that Peter had attacked.

One wonders if Peter feared some kind of retribution from this slave for what he'd done to his relative. In any case, Peter was very quick to deny any association with Jesus.

[14:33] Well, the morning hours were ticking by. It was getting towards dawn. Maybe twilight had begun on Good Friday. The very time of day when the roosters announced that the sun is going to rise shortly.

And one rooster did just that at that moment. At that moment, we're told, the cock crowed. No, this was not some coincidence.

For back in verse 38 of chapter 13, Jesus prophesied of Peter that before the cock crowed, he would deny Jesus three times. Friends, even the timing of the crowing of the rooster is in God's sovereign control.

God is fully in control of our world despite appearances. You know, we deny Jesus all the time. I know I do. How do we deny Jesus in our lives today? When we sin. When we disobey God.

[15:44] And we all do that. There may be some here who don't believe that they are sinful. I have an aunt who believes this. That she's not sinful at all. Which is sinful in itself.

In the end, when we sin, we're denying God and denying the Lord Jesus. When we intentionally hurt another person, we deny Jesus. When we take a cheap shot at someone, we deny Jesus.

When we do not love and cherish our spouse, our children, our parents, other family members, or our friends, we deny Jesus then.

When we hope we won't be noticed as Christians, we deny Jesus. When we decide to keep quiet rather than speaking up for what is right and good, then we deny Jesus. When we're silent about our relationship with God, then we deny Jesus.

When we accept the prevailing values of our non-Christian culture, we deny Jesus then too. when we live moral, when we live moral, upright, and Christ-honouring lives, then we're confessing our faith in Christ.

[17 : 04] When we're looking for opportunities to speak about our faith to others with sensitivity, well, then we confess our faith in Christ. When we help others in need, then we're confessing our faith in Jesus.

When we take a stand for justice, when we love others, we confess our faith in Christ. When we use our lives and resources to carry out his desires rather than our own, then we confess our faith in Christ.

But you know, when we do deny the Lord Jesus in some of the ways I mentioned, forgiveness is available. Denying Jesus is not the unforgivable sin. And thank God for that.

Jesus forgave Peter. You can read about that in the very last chapter of John's Gospel. And we know that however we may deny Jesus, he is willing and able to forgive us when we confess our sins to him.

I invite you to confess your sins to Jesus, whatever they may be, and there'll be an opportunity shortly in our service for us to do that as a congregation. However you may have denied him, you can receive his full and wonderful forgiveness.

[18 : 19] Well let me conclude by sharing with you my favourite verse from the entire Bible which I think is actually very relevant in our passage and our topic this morning. It's actually from John chapter 6 and it's verses 67 and 68.

I'll just explain that at this point some of Jesus' followers, not the 12 disciples but some of the other followers, had abandoned Jesus and had left him. And Jesus is speaking to the 12 disciples and he says in verse 67 of chapter 6, Do you also wish to go away?

Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.

where else do we go? We have come to believe besides the Lord Jesus for our forgiveness and assurance of a friendship and peace with God. I'm going to finish by using these words of Peter in a prayer that we can quietly pray in our hearts so I invite you to pray.

Let's pray. Lord God, we echo Peter's words as we say to you, Lord, to whom can we go?

[19 : 34] You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. Lord God, may this truth permeate every part of our being, every relationship we have and everything we do to your honour, praise and glory.

In your name we pray. Amen.