

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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John 18:12-27 -- A Night of Questioning

by Dan Trygg

“So the Roman cohort and the commander, and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus, and bound Him and led Him to Annas first, for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.” (vss. 12,13) -- **The office of the high priesthood was subject to the domination of Rome.** Though they were somewhat tolerant of the Jewish religious practices, they reserved the right to remove any high priest who was perceived as a liability to the interests of the Empire. **In the OT, the high priesthood was a life-long position. Annas, appointed high priest in A.D. 6, offended the Romans and was deposed in A.D. 15.** He was then succeeded briefly by his son, Eleazar, who in turn was replaced by Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, in A.D. 18. **Although Caiaphas continued in this role officially until A.D. 36, most Jews probably still viewed Annas as the true high priest.**

It is quite obvious that Jesus' Jewish trial was an attempt to squeeze as much of the process into as brief a time as possible, and still maintain some arguable semblance of legality. Normally, there were three aspects of a trial, (1.) a preliminary hearing; (2.) a trial before the ruling high priest and the Sanhedrin; and (3.) the final decision and sentencing by the Council of the Sanhedrin. Since Jewish law forbade the sentencing of a man on the same day as his trial, the hearing before Annas was probably conducted to give the appearance (and justification) of having followed proper protocol. **Thus we have (1.) a separate preliminary hearing before Annas** (Jn. 18:12,13,19-24); **(2.) the night meeting of Jesus with the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas, which served as His trial** (Matt. 26:57-68); and, **(3.) the gathering again of the high priest and the Council shortly after daybreak for the necessary legal conviction and sentencing** (Matt. 27:1; Mk. 15:1; Lk. 22:66-71). From there, the Council would bring Him to Pilate, “very early in the morning” (i.e., probably between 6:00 and 7:00 a.m.), so that they could gain the desired sentence of death. **Thus, within a period of only 12 hours or less, Jesus was arrested, charged before an inquest, tried, convicted and sentenced to death.** Most people in Jerusalem would have been unaware of the events of this night, until well after the entire judicial process was over, and He was on His way to the cross.

“Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews...” (vs. 14) -- A reference to 11:47-53. Is there likely to be a fair trial before one who thought it expedient that Jesus die for the “greater good” of keeping the peace?

“Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple.” (vs. 15) -- From John alone we find out how it was that Peter came into the courtyard of the high priest. ***“So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in.”*** (vs. 16) -- John's family apparently was familiar enough to the family and servants of the high priest that no one questioned his request. ***“You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?”*** (vs. 17) -- Note that the way the servant girl asks the question implies that she knew that John was a follower of Jesus. This should not surprise us. If John was so familiar to the high priest's household, his association with Jesus must have been well known to them all. Yet, in spite of the fact that John's presence was tolerated, Peter still was afraid to admit his relationship with Jesus of Nazareth. ***“Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.”*** (vs. 18) -- The mention of the charcoal fire and Peter's behavior are details we might expect of an eyewitness account. They set the stage for Peter's other denials. There was a group huddled together for warmth around this fire. Peter was trying to “blend in”, as well as keeping warm.

The hearing before Annas. ***“The high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teachings.”*** (vs. 19) -- The direction of this line of interrogation was apparently to incriminate others, probably reflecting his intention of arresting the entire inner circle of Jesus' disciples. ***“Jesus answered him, ‘I have spoken openly to the world; ...and I spoke nothing in secret.’”*** (vs. 20) -- The Lord's response is a simple statement that what He was in public was no different than what He was or taught in private with His disciples. There was no hidden agenda or “secret society” behind the scenes. ***“Why do you question Me?”*** (vs. 21) -- In the Jewish legal system, the accused was supposed to be presumed innocent, unless witnesses would testify against him. In any case, not only was Jesus' testimony not required to prove His innocence, ...it was also clearly not of any value to those who were present, since they already considered Him guilty. ***“Question those who have heard what I spoke to them.”*** -- This would be the proper course of action. ***“...one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, ‘Is that the way You answer the high priest?’”*** (vs. 22) -- To strike an accused person in either a hearing or a court trial was not only *uncalled for*, it was also *illegal*. Jesus' response was exactly to the point, not at all out of place. To these abusive authorities, however, any questioning of their methods was neither *accepted* nor *tolerated*. The apostle Paul experienced similar treatment at the hands of the high priest officiating at his trial (Acts 23:1-3). ***Clearly, these men were corrupt, the legal process***

was merely a sham, and Jesus was NOT going to be getting a fair trial. “Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?’” (vs. 23) -- The Lord was not intimidated by their abuse. Instead, He confronted the perpetrator with his wrong. It was clear to all there who the innocent and the guilty really were. **“So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.”** (vs. 24) -- Note that in vs. 22, the officer refers to Annas as the high priest, but here Caiaphas is recognized as the current officiating high priest. **It is the trial before Caiaphas and the entire Council of the Sanhedrin that is highlighted by Matthew (26:59-68) and Mark (14:53-65), while Luke’s account focuses on the gathering of the next morning (Lk. 22:66-23:1; cf. Mk. 15:1).** As we have seen so often in our study of John’s gospel, *the author assumes that the readers have access to other gospel accounts, and chooses to avoid reduplication.* Instead, he simply fills in the gaps in our knowledge by relaying other information which is missing from the earlier accounts. Hence, **John is the only gospel writer to tell us about this earlier appearance of Jesus before Annas.** Since the high priests were part of the Sadducees, the wealthy noblemen who owned property in the Jerusalem area, it is likely that Annas met with Jesus in one part of the high priest’s estate, while Caiaphas was convening the other Council members in preparation for the trial of Jesus in another part of the property. Peter would not have found it necessary to leave the courtyard of the high priest, since both trials would have been held in the nearby buildings.

Peter’s final denials. We saw earlier that the gatekeeper had prompted the first denial (vs. 17). We saw, too, that Peter joined others warming themselves by a fire (vs. 18). When we attempt to combine the accounts of the various gospel writers, it is important that we realize that there were a number of people nearby. **What is universally stated is that Peter denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. The number of questions put to him, however, certainly cannot be limited to three.** Some may have been asked in “clusters” by different people in the group, who asked them almost simultaneously. Some scholars, have found up to six separate denials by Peter, based upon the fact that Mark’s version records that Jesus said Peter would deny Him before the rooster crowed *twice* (14:30,72), while the others do not mention more than one cock crow. Some have suggested three denials before the first cockcrow, and an additional three times between the first crow and the second crow. Some of these variations can be explained in terms of (1.) Mark giving us more information about the specific rooster crow being referred to, while the other writers left out the details as unimportant to their purposes; and (2.) there were occasions when Peter was asked questions by more than one person, to which he responded by a single denial. Thus, there could have been several who may have queried him, but on only three occasions did he respond by a denial statement.

According to John’s account, Peter’s first denial happened earlier, when **the girl at the gate** asked him if he, like John, was a disciple of Jesus (vs. 17). A second challenge was delivered by yet **another servant girl** in the courtyard (Matt. 26:69; Mk. 14:66), when he was warming himself by the fire, to which he replied, “Woman, I do not know Him” (Lk. 22:57). “I do not know nor understand what you are talking about” (Mk. 14:68). Again, a little later, **a third person, this time a man**, saw him and said, “You are one of them too!” To this, Peter replied, “Man, I am not!” (Lk. 22:58). [Some manuscripts of Mark’s gospel include, in 14:68, “...and a rooster sounded”.] After this encounter, Peter apparently withdrew to the gateway porch, or forecourt, where yet **another servant girl** (Matt. 26:71) accused him of being “with Jesus” to the ones gathered there. Matthew records that he “denied it with an oath, ‘I do not know the man.’” In a fifth interchange, **a relative of Malchus**, the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said to him, “Did I not see you in the garden?” Peter denied that, as well (Jn. 18:26,27). **A sixth individual, a man**, now about an hour after the confrontation by the man in the courtyard (Lk. 22:59), began to insist that Peter was with Jesus, because he was a Galilean. Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” Then **the bystanders** came up and said, “Surely, you too are one of them, for even the way you talk gives you away” (Matt. 26:73). Peter began to curse and swear, “I do not know the man!” **“...immediately a rooster crowed.”** (vs. 27) -- Luke adds that this happened while *Peter was still speaking*, and at that moment *Jesus turned to look at him*. Then Peter remembered what the Lord had said, and went out weeping bitterly (Lk. 22:60,61).

There are three lessons to highlight from these events: **First, we observe the creative gyrations of legalism.** This is consistent with what we know of extra-biblical reports of the religious groups of that day. They were sticklers for following certain aspects of the law, while violating the very heart and spirit of what the law was intending. People find ways to put on an appearance of legality, while selfishly manipulating things to get their way. We see it on every level of human society: in families, in companies, in churches, in government. **Second, we can observe that Jesus both spoke up for Himself, for truth and proper procedure, and then He also chose to be silent.** There are times to speak up, and there are times to be silent (Ecc. 3:7). It is appropriate to speak up for justice and truth, to remind others of the right way. When surrounded by unjust and oppressive authorities, however, the prudent person will keep silent (Amos 5:13). He will not be heard anyway, and may make himself the untimely target of evil men. **Third, the fear of man brings a snare** (Prov. 25:25). For all his bravado and good intentions, when it came down to it, fear ruled in Peter’s life. May we have grace to trust in Yahweh instead of fear people.