

“Going From Heaven to Hell”

(Spiritual Shades of Gray)

John 18:1-40

September 21, 2014

INTRO: If John 17 is arguably the brightest light in all the Bible... Then John 18 just might be the Scripture’s darkest tunnel & slipperiest of all slopes. -JDP

CONTEXT: John 18 literally picks up at the close of Christ’s inter-Trinitarian prayer (for all present & future Christians), and concludes with the last words prior to the crucifixion-prepping, torture of Jesus.

TIMELESS TRUTH: We ALL need to BE-gospeled daily!

TEXT THEMES:

1. *Satanic Sin*
2. *Sovereign Shepherd*
3. *Stumbling Saints*
4. *Systemic Sin*
5. *Suffering Savior*

SHADES of GRAY:

A.	<i>Indefensible Gray</i>	Judas	BETRAYAL
B.	<i>Ignorant Gray</i>	Authorities (A)	UNLAWFUL
c.	<i>Informed Gray</i>	Authorities (B)	HYPOCRITICAL
D.	<i>Inspired Gray</i>	Peter	DENIAL
E.	<i>Influential Gray</i>	Annas	INFLUENTIAL
F.	<i>Infected Gray</i>	Officer	UNIMAGINABLE
G.	<i>Inexcusable Gray</i>	Caiaphas	EVIL (personified)
H.	<i>Infested Gray</i>	Jews	PREJUDICIAL
I.	<i>Insidious Gray</i>	Pilate	PREDICTABLE
J.	<i>Insolent Gray</i>	Barabbas	TANGENTIAL

Chapter Sequence/Outline

v.1 = Context (Quad of God)

vv.2-3a = Judas

BETRAYAL

vv.3b = Authorities

A. Roman

B. Religion

UNLAWFUL

HYPOCRITICAL

vv.4-9 = Jesus (Sov Shepherd)

vv.10-11 = Simon Peter (disobeys)

DENIAL

v.12 = T/S: Jesus bound & arrested

vv.13ff = Annas (arrive at his home)

INFLUENTIAL

vv.15-18 = Simon Peter (Denies #1)

vv.19-21 = Annas (interrogates Jesus)

v.22-23 = Abusive Officer

UNIMAGINABLE

v.24 = Caiaphas (Jesus sent to him)

EVIL

vv.25-27 = Simon Peter (2,3, rooster)

v.28 = T/S (contextual nuggets)

- Ciaiphas' to Pilate's

- Intro Pilate

- No entry due to eatery

- World's #1 hypocris

INTRO:

All four Gospels share the same basic outline: Jesus was arrested near Jerusalem, he was tried and convicted, and he was executed on a cross. Within this outline, the Gospels offer numerous consistent details: (1) Jesus and the disciples depart from the city for a location on the West side of the Mount of Olives; (2) Judas arrives with a crowd to take Jesus into custody; (3) Jesus is examined by the high priest; (4) Jesus is examined by the Roman Pontius Pilate; (5) Pilate infers Jesus' innocence and offers to release one of his prisoners; (6) the crowd calls for Barabbas's release; (7) Pilate gives the order of death for Jesus; (8) Jesus is crucified with two men; (9) the soldiers divide Jesus' clothes among themselves; (10) Jesus is offered wine; (11) Jesus dies; (12) Joseph of Arimathea requests Jesus' body for burial.

John's Gospel shares this outline and these details. Thus it is absurd for anyone to suggest that John is not linked to sound historical traditions in his Passion account. But John does add numerous independent details, and he omits a few things. Among those omissions are the following: (1) the betrayal with a kiss; (2) Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane; (3) the sleepiness of the disciples; (4) the healing of the servant's ear; (5) Simon of Cyrene; (6) the mocking crowds; (7) Jesus' cry from the cross.

John also adds a number of details: (1) Roman soldiers falling to the ground in the arrest scene when Jesus identifies himself; (2) Jesus' conversation with Annas; (3) Jesus' conversation with Pilate; (4) John's emphasis on the inscription on the cross; (5) a full description of Jesus' garments; (6) Mary given to the Beloved Disciple at the cross; (7) Jesus' body threatened with the breaking of his legs; (8) Jesus pierced with a soldier's lance; (9) Nicodemus's joining Joseph at Jesus' burial.

- NIV Application Commentary

The story of Jesus' arrest and trial was essential for the earliest Christians and perhaps was one of the first explanations about Jesus' life that circulated. It answered fundamental questions: *How and why did the Messiah die?* Therefore the story contains

a precision and density that is striking, and it is not unusual to find incidental details of history anchoring it to eyewitness testimony. John reminds us explicitly that his story is based on an eyewitness report ([19:35](#)), and he adds footnotes along the way confirming his knowledge of the details (e.g., [18:1](#), [3](#), [10](#), [13](#), [18](#), [28](#)... - NIV

T/S: THE OPENING WORDS of chapter 18 link the Passion story with the Farewell Discourse. Once Jesus completes these teachings (his farewell and prayer), he leads his disciples out of the city to a garden that he frequented ([18:2](#); cf. [Luke 22:39](#)). The Synoptics also refer to this departure ([Matt. 26:30](#); [Mark 14:26](#); [Luke 22:39](#)). Since it is Passover, they are required to remain in the city precincts that night, and Bethany is beyond the permissible limit. East of Jerusalem's walled city is a steep valley called the Kidron This valley is a riverbed that remains dry most of the year but flows only following winter rains...

- NIV Application Commentary

Judas Betrays Jesus

¹When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples.

NOTE: ch.18 (like ch.17) unfolds in the presence of the disciples... Why? It's no accident or coincidence. Our Lord shared His prayer to forever help His disciples INFORM, INSPECT, & INSPIRE others... And so it is with His multiple betrayals in ch. 18. - JDP

Quote: “Sin began in the garden of Eden, there the curse was pronounced, there the Redeemer was promised; and in a garden that promised Seed entered into conflict with the old serpent.”

- *Matthew Henry*

"Gethsemane." We should not think of a decorative garden like those built for pleasure in Europe or North America. This is an olive grove ("Gethsemane" means olive press, [Matt. 26:36](#); [Mark 14:32](#)), which grew along the west shoulder of the Mount of Olives. At this point, the Synoptic Gospels record Jesus' prayer in the olive grove ([Mark 14:32-42](#)). John does not refer to it.

- **NIV Application Commentary**

[John 18:1](#) opens an entirely new section of the Book of Glory. Jesus now moves toward the climax of the "hour" we have anticipated throughout the Gospel. If the Farewell Discourse was a preparation for the coming of the darkness, in chapters 18-19 the darkness arrives. Jesus is arrested and taken into custody. He is interrogated both by Judaism's high priest and by Pilate. Then he is crucified. As we will see, however, John introduces important theological nuances to the story, aiding us as readers to anticipate the triumph of resurrection recorded in chapters 20-21. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" ([1:5](#), NIV note). At the close of the Gospel the pendulum swings back to its lofty original height. The glory of Jesus, his light and truth, radiate through the final chapters, showing that he indeed has overcome the world and death ([16:33](#)).

- **NIV Application Commentary,**

2Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples.

“Judas...who was betraying Him”

NOTE:

- A. “Betrayal is the most vile form of evil... because it cultivates and manipulates the love & trust it receives, only to mutilate the one loving and trusting.” - JDP

“BETRAY” - verb

1. **to deliver or expose to an enemy by treachery or disloyalty:**
Benedict Arnold betrayed his country.
 2. **to be unfaithful** in guarding, maintaining, or fulfilling: *to betray a trust.*
 3. to disappoint the hopes or expectations of; be disloyal to: *to betray one's friends.*
 4. to reveal or disclose in violation of confidence: *to betray a secret.*
 5. to reveal unconsciously (something **one** would preferably conceal):
Her nervousness betrays her insecurity.
 6. to show or exhibit; reveal; disclose:
an unfeeling remark that betrays his lack of concern.
 7. **to deceive, misguide, or corrupt:**
a young lawyer betrayed by political ambitions into irreparable folly.
- B. **NOTE:** Betrayal’s sin is a stiletto vs. a sword. - JDP
- C. **NOTE:** Betrayal often happens in intimate places
- D. **NOTE:** Betrayers are cunning & conniving cowards

- E. **NOTE:** Betrayers usually get others to do the deed
- F. **NOTE:** Betrayal leads to misery – for both parties.

3 Judas then, having received the *Roman* cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Quote: At the beginning, then, we have a signal of Roman interest in Jesus and a hint that Pilate may already be participating. The presence of chief priests and Pharisees recalls their appearances elsewhere in the Gospel ([7:32](#), [45](#); [11:47](#), [57](#)) and indicates that these leaders, priestly aristocrats and teachers of the law, who had plotted Jesus' death earlier under Caiaphas's direction ([11:53](#)), are now putting their plan into action. Therefore ***John's portrait is clear: The entire world—both Jew and Gentile—has come against Jesus.*** Responsibility for what happens next rests with all of them.

- Gary Burge

NOTE: Lost sinners tend to band together...

NOTE: Commitments without Christ are corruptible. - JDP

NOTE: Don't ever place your hope or trust in the hands of the government...

NOTE: Don't confuse the religious for the redeemed...

NOTE: Beware those who bring guns to gardens...

NOTE: While the Synoptics only mention a Jewish guard at the arrest, John refers to "a detachment of soldiers" ([18:3](#)) who appear alongside the Jewish police

4So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, “Whom do you seek?”

Jesus demonstrates that He IS: (see vv.4-11)

KING - as they “fall down”

JUDGE - as He insists the others go (legal instruction)

SHEPHERD - as He lays down His life for His sheep

SAVIOR - as He reprimands Peter (I will drink the cup)

See the parallel...

Christ’s first recorded words in John’s Gospel:

“What do you want?”

Now, in the Garden darkness...

“Who do you seek?”

Motive matters in eternity’s greatest question!

NOTE: You can betray Jesus but you can’t surprise Him

NOTE: Jesus knows ALL things!

NOTE: There were no surprises... (garden or cross)

Heb. 12:1-2: *Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of*

our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

NOTE: See the parallel between David going to Goliath and Jesus going to Judas... “The giant-maker is also the giant-slayer. Our King fears no foe!”- JDP

KEY: It is likely at this point that, according to the Synoptics, Judas marks Jesus with a kiss (cf. [Mark 14:44](#)). - NIV Application Commentary

⁵They answered Him, “Jesus the Nazarene.” He said to them, “I am He.” And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them.

Jesus identifies himself plainly ([18:5-7](#)) but this certainly means a great deal more than a mere self-identification. Jesus uses the "I am" formula we have seen elsewhere in the Gospel (e.g., [4:26](#); [8:24](#), [58](#)), which no doubt recalls God's divine name John underscores this in [18:6](#), "When Jesus said, 'I am . . . ,' they drew back and fell to the ground."

(NIV Application Commentary)

This is a theophany in which God has been revealed before mortals and the only response is to fall prostrate... see Ezek. 1:28; Isa. 6:5 - (Barrett, Brown, Beasley-Murray).

NOTE: Sadly, it is not uncommon to seek Jesus for all the wrong reasons...

⁶So when He said to them, “I am *He*,” they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷Therefore He again asked them, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus the Nazarene.” ⁸Jesus answered, “I told you that I am *He*; so if you seek Me, let these go their way,” ⁹to fulfill the word which He spoke, “Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one.”

Quote: “Our Lord Jesus, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth and asked, Whom seek ye? When the people would have forced him to a crown, he withdrew, [John 6:15](#), but when they came to force him to a cross, he offered himself; for he came into this world to suffer, and went to the other world to reign. He showed plainly what he could have done; when he struck them down he could have struck them dead...”
- *Matthew Henry*

Jesus not only steps forward (thus taking charge of his own arrest), but he protects his followers from capture (18:8-9) and so fulfills what he said in 17:12 (cf. 6:39). Of those whom God has given to him, he has not lost one. Twice Jesus makes his captors say that he alone is the one they seek (18:5, 7). This recalls the image we have of Jesus the shepherd in chapter 10—not only laying down his life for his sheep (10:11, 17-18) but also preserving them and not letting them become victims left to the wolves (10:12).

- Gary Burge

10 Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. **11** So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"

v.11: Jesus then points to the "cup" the Father has given him to drink ([John 18:11](#)). This reference recalls the Synoptic Gethsemane prayer ([Mark 14:36](#); but cf. [John 12:27-28](#)), but now the struggle with Jesus' fate belongs to Peter, who cannot face the "cup" that includes the cross. Jesus, by contrast, understands that this is God's will and so will not hesitate to embrace it. – NIV.

T/S: Jesus, Peter, and Annas ([18:12-27](#))

ACCORDING TO JOHN'S rendition, Jesus is then taken to Annas ([18:12-14](#)), where he is interrogated ([18:19-24](#)) and simultaneously Peter is questioned in the courtyard ([18:15-18](#), [25-27](#)). The literary interlocking of these parallel stories invites us to contrast them and reflect on their symbolic value.

Under full armed arrest (note that both Roman and Jewish troops continue working together, [18:12](#)), Jesus is brought to meet Annas, Caiaphas's father-in-law. - Gary Burge

[12](#)So the *Roman* cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, [13](#)and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. [14](#)Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.

[15](#)Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest,

Yet the view that this is the Beloved Disciple has a great deal to commend it. Throughout the gospel the Beloved Disciple frequently appears alongside Peter ([13:23-26](#); [20:2-10](#); [21:7-8, 20-24](#)), a portrait also common in the Synoptics ([Mark 5:37](#); [9:2](#); [13:13](#); [14:33](#)). The Beloved Disciple faithfully follows Jesus even to the site of the cross, where Jesus talks to him ([John 19:25-27](#)). His presence at the arrest shows his profound loyalty to Jesus so characteristic throughout the Gospel. We also must be careful not to stereotype fishermen and think of them as poor, uneducated, and socially margin-alized—and thus unable to know Jerusalem's leaders. John's father, Zebedee, had hired servants ([Mark 1:20](#)). Brown makes the interesting (and compelling) argument that John (of Zebedee) may have been related to Jesus, which also explains the Beloved Disciple's responsibility in [19:26-27](#) to take care of Jesus' mother (we will look at this theory in ch. 19) If Jesus and John are cousins, then Mary's priestly connections in Jerusalem ([Luke 1:36-45](#)) may well have connected John with Jerusalem too.

- NIV Application Commentary,

[16](#)but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in.

That John refers to Annas as "high priest" should not confuse since he clearly understands Caiaphas to be the ruling high priest and Jerusalem can only have *one* ([18:24](#)). Judaism understood that appointment to this position was permanent ([Num. 35:25](#)), so that when Rome removed such men, the continued use of this title became a courtesy. - NIV

[17](#)Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also *one* of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."

Each of the four Gospels record Peter's denials of Jesus during his interrogation by the Jewish authorities. On one level Jesus has predicted this ([13:38](#)) and so his foreknowledge includes not simply the events of the arrest, but the responses of his followers. Nevertheless it is a tragedy since throughout the story (both in John and the Synoptics) Peter figures prominently and the denials represent Jesus' apparent loss of a major follower. - NIV

18 Now the slaves and the officers were standing *there*, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.

19 The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching.

In a formal Jewish trial, the judge never asked direct questions of the accused but rather called forth witnesses whose words determined the outcome. If two or more agreed with the charges, the verdict was sealed. But Annas may not see himself engaged in such a trial. If it were a genuine trial, Caiaphas would be presiding, but he is not present ([18:24](#)). This is like a "police interrogation" of someone recently arrested. Yet if Jesus does utter something incriminating, Annas himself will become a witness against him.

The words recorded here no doubt represent the barest summary of Jesus' meeting with Annas, who probes two things: Jesus' teachings and his disciples ([18:19](#)). To what extent is he a genuine threat? Does he have a strong following? Is he promoting some sort of conspiracy? A secret conspiracy? To what extent does he threaten their interests? Jesus' sharp answer—pointing out that Annas should be talking to witnesses—unmasks the priest's attempt to make Jesus' incriminate himself. Twice Jesus demands that Annas produce witnesses and evidence; in other words, Jesus is demanding a trial.

- **NIV Application Commentary,**

[20](#) Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. [21](#) "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." [22](#) When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?"

"False prophesy" is the classic charge against Jesus reported in the Talmud (*b. Sanh.* 43a). To qualify as a false prophet one must "secretly entice" or "deceive" the people ([Matt. 24:11, 24](#); [Mark 13:5, 22](#); [Luke 21:8](#)). The punishment for this was death ([Deut. 13:1-11](#)). Twice before this was precisely the suggestion uttered by the crowds ([7:12](#)) and the Pharisees ([7:47](#)).

Jesus has thus reminded Annas of judicial procedure, which the guards interpret as insolence. Thus, one of them strikes him ([18:22](#)).

- NIV Application Commentary,

[23](#) Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" [24](#) So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

That Jesus is sent first to Annas is plausible if he is the de facto power behind Caiaphas. This meeting may have been arranged in advance if Caiaphas (who originally determined that Jesus

should die, [11:49-51](#)) is seeking to broaden his base of support vis-à-vis Rome. Since Jesus remains with Annas until [18:24](#), we should assume that all generic references to the "high priest" until then refer to Annas ([18:15](#), [16](#), [19](#), [22](#)). Thus the interrogation in [18:19-24](#) represents the gist of Annas's questioning.

Note that Jesus here (as later) simply points to the truth ([18:23](#)). He speaks directly to the soldier. There are no witnesses accusing him. He has not been subversive. No evidence says he has led people astray. Nothing he has said can be construed as incriminating. Annas is at an impasse. His probing has been unsuccessful. Therefore Jesus is sent on to the reigning high priest, Caiaphas.

- NIV Application Commentary,

Peter's Denial of Jesus

[25](#) Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not also *one* of His disciples, are you?" He denied *it*, and said, "I am not."

Jesus is moved to a new location This is not shameless harmonizing, particularly if we presuppose that John realizes his readership already is aware of the story (esp. Mark's story; see comments above). John continues with the denials of Peter in [18:25](#) (which he left off at [18:18](#)); he assumes that Peter is still in Annas's courtyard (they are still at the fire, [18:25](#)). But according to the Synoptics, Peter's denials take place at the house of Caiaphas at the close of the Sanhedrin meeting ([Mark 14:64](#), [66](#)). John has split the denials so that the first one happens simultaneously with the meeting with Annas while the second and third happen as Jesus is before Caiaphas (which is the Synoptic setting). – NIV

[26](#)One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" [27](#)Peter then denied *it* again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

When John says that Jesus is sent to Caiaphas, it does not mean necessarily that he moves to the other side of the city. He is moved *to Caiaphas*, who may well be nearby (like moving from one courtroom to another) We can imagine that Jesus' conversation with Annas takes place while Caiaphas is gathering the needed members of the Sanhedrin in the same locale. According to the Synoptic outline, Caiaphas meets with Jesus during the night with numerous Sanhedrin members ([Mark 14:55](#)). Early the next morning it reconvenes in order to consolidate the decision ([15:1](#)). John's account points to the late night meeting; then we should assume a lengthy pause before [18:28](#), when Jesus is taken early in the morning to Pilate.

By weaving Peter's denials among the various interrogations of Jesus, John makes a theological point. Brown aptly comments: "John has constructed a dramatic contrast wherein Jesus stands up to his questioners and denies nothing, while Peter cowers before his questioners and denies everything. Of course, Peter's triple denial will return in John's story, for in [21:15-17](#) Peter meets with Jesus in Galilee and is invited three times to affirm his love for him.

- NIV Application Commentary,

T/S: Jewish and Hellenistic sources tell us a great deal about Pilate, most of which is extremely critical. He was a brutal ruler whose atrocities against the Jews were legendary. As a member of Rome's lower nobility he was always aware of his vulnerabilities and so controlled Judea harshly, with an eye on the pleasure of his masters in Rome (see below, [19:12](#)).

Early in the morning the Jewish leadership brought Jesus to the "Praetorium" (NIV "palace of the Roman governor"), which refers to his residence ([18:28](#)). - NIV

Jesus before Pilate

[28](#) Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.

Historical Context: What meal do they wish to eat in [18:28](#) and so remain clean? I argued earlier that Jesus' meal on Thursday night was the Passover meal (Nisan 15, keeping it in accord with the Synoptic story; see comments on [13:1](#)). On the day following the evening Passover meal there was another ritual meal, the *chagiga*, the feast-offering of the first full morning of Passover day ([Num. 28:16-25](#)). This day (Nisan 15) also began the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread—a feast immediately following Passover. Therefore any ritual contamination would make the leaders apprehensive, given their role in all these festivities. They were concerned not with the Passover meal the night before, but with the many meals and celebrations that week in the Passover season, which continued till Nisan 21. - NIV

v.28: Jewish and Hellenistic sources tell us a great deal about Pilate, most of which is extremely critical. He was a brutal ruler whose atrocities against the Jews were legendary. As a member of Rome's lower nobility he was always aware of his vulnerabilities and so controlled Judea harshly, with an eye on the pleasure of his masters in Rome (see below, [19:12](#)).

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[29](#)Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" [30](#)They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you." [31](#)So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," [32](#)to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

[33](#)Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

Luke reports: "And they [the Sanhedrin leaders] began to accuse [Jesus], saying, 'We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king'" ([Luke 23:2](#)). Such a charge would clearly get Pilate's attention. Is Jesus involved in political sedition? Is he one more Jewish terrorist-revolutionary with a head full of messianic notions and a band of well-armed followers?

- NIV Application Commentary,

[34](#)Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" [35](#)Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" [36](#)Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." [37](#)Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

In the Synoptics Jesus simply echoes, "You say [that I am]," conceding that this is the label applied to him but not wanting to affirm the political meaning attached to the term (see [18:37](#)).

Unlike the Synoptics, however, Jesus provides a definition of his kingship ([18:36](#)). This is one of the few places in John where Jesus refers to his kingdom (Gk. *basileia*; see also [3:3](#), [5](#); Matthew uses *basileia* fifty-five times). He deflects all political implications by pointing to the other-worldly nature of his rulership. It has not originated with this world, and he is not a rival to Caesar. The true test of his kingdom can be seen in the behavior of his disciples. They will not engage in combat or struggle against Rome's rule. He is no threat to Rome. The one instance of violence when Peter struck Malchus was promptly rebuked by Jesus ([18:11](#)). - NIV

A good paraphrase of [18:37a](#) might be: "So you're telling me that you are indeed some kind of king?" Jesus' response ([18:37b](#)) is nicely phrased by Dodd: "King is *your* word, not mine. Having said what his kingdom is *not*, Jesus can now say what it is—a kingdom of truth. His mission began in heaven and so he possesses a divine charge: He has come to unveil the truth to the world—not to point out true things as he finds them, but to unveil himself, his voice (which is God's voice), and his words (which are God's words). - NIV

Therefore "truth" does not refer to a commitment to truthfulness (or honesty) in the first instance. Rather, truth is a theological term. "Truth" is what we see when we see God. Jesus is thus "the truth" ([14:6](#); [1 John 2:20-23](#)). It is reality lived out in divine light...

- Gary Burge

[38](#) Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him.

"What is truth?" is the question you ask when truth is the last thing you want to hear.

- Gary Burge

In [9:29](#) Jesus said that he came into the world for judgment, unmasking the heartfelt dispositions of humanity. Ironically Jesus has been asking Pilate questions from the beginning. Now Pilate has been challenged (Will he side with truth or falsehood?) and now he carries the burden of response. But his cynical question, "What is truth?" reveals his true position, that he cannot recognize the things of God and will avoid the light ([3:21](#)). He is not among those given to Jesus by God ([17:6](#)). He waits for no answer to his question because he does not believe there is any. He then leaves the room.

TRUTH is a PERSON 14:6

TRUTH is a POWER & PURIFIER 17:17

TRUTH is a PURPOSE 18:37

When Pilate returns to the Sanhedrin emissaries, he announces Jesus' innocence, "I find no basis for a charge against him" (18:38). Having given this verdict (which is repeated two more times, 19:4, 6), the deeper question for Pilate is whether he will act on the truth he has seen. He does not see a man here who threatens Rome; Jesus does not qualify as a terrorist.

- NIV Application Commentary,

39“But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?”

The deepest irony of all comes in [18:39-40](#) when Pilate refers to Jesus as "the king of the Jews." It is difficult to interpret his motive. By bringing up the amnesty it is clear that he wants to have Jesus released. By using this title, he is endorsing it as something that is meaningless to Rome. But John and his readers can see it as a true identification of who Jesus is. This is one more example of Johannine dramas happening at multiple levels. – **Gary Burge**

40So they cried out again, saying, “Not this Man, but Barabbas.” Now Barabbas was a robber.

Irony often shocks and the scene closes with the crowd calling instead for the release of Barabbas ([18:40](#)) While Jesus was no political threat to Rome, Barabbas was. Translations differ on how to interpret *lestes*, the Greek word used to describe Barabbas. The RSV and KJV "robber" is certainly wrong; the NIV paraphrase is a

bit nearer the mark ("Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion"). A *lestes* was a violent man who could rob (e.g., in the Samaritan parable, [Luke 10:30](#); cf. [2 Cor. 11:26](#)) or fight in uprisings. Josephus uses the term for Zealot leaders. Such a person was a guerrilla fighter or, as the Romans would view him, a "terrorist."

In other words, a man who *is* a genuine threat to Rome, a man with proven capability to challenge the military occupation of Israel, a man with demonstrated tendencies toward violence, is poised to go free. Jesus, by contrast, a man in whom there is no danger and whose followers will not fight, remains in custody. - NIV

BRIDGING Contemplations & Applications:

John is *not* pointing to the ongoing responsibility of Judaism for Jesus' death. Centuries of Christian anti-Semitism are indefensible and may not be anchored here. But having said this, we must face squarely the fact that John does see the responsibility lying with their leadership. Judaism was *betrayed* by its leaders this Passover. Caiaphas and Annas represent men whose devotion to their religious careers and the political status quo exceeded their willingness to see God at work in Jesus. They have become the dangerous shepherds of chapter 10, whose interest in the welfare of the flock has been superseded by their own self-preservation. Now as an interpreter I have to ask a difficult question: In my presentation of this material, do I simply tell the historical story (Jesus died at the hands of Pilate through the manipulations of the Sanhedrin), or do I go beyond the story and see here a paradigm, a model of bad shepherds at work?

This is the King of glory, now arrayed before Israel. God is at work within these events (this is "the hour" he planned from the beginning) and Jesus is still in control. He asks the questions and makes the judgments. He alone has power that comes from "above." Despite the

difficulties of the world's treatment of God and his Son, God will prevail. God's glory and power cannot be suppressed or be contained by the plots of human antagonists. - NIV Application Commentary,

Peter's denials in 18:15-18, 25-27. The account of Peter's denials is not a unique feature of the Johannine story but has parallels in the three Synoptic Gospels. It is profitable to follow the profile of Peter up to this point in John's Gospel. Unlike Mark's Gospel, which provides a consistently critical portrait of the apostle's heroics and shortcomings, John gives Peter a sterling role till now. He was a model disciple and among one of Jesus' first converts (1:42). When many are scandalized at Jesus' shocking words, he alone stands fast, urging that there is nowhere else to go to find eternal life (6:68). Because he respects Jesus deeply, he refuses to let him wash his feet (13:6); then, when he learns that this is a prerequisite for discipleship, he asks for a full bath (13:9). In the Upper Room when the disciples hear clearly Jesus' prediction of his coming death, Peter is heroic, refusing to believe he will ever renounce his Lord (13:37). In the garden he impulsively, albeit sincerely, tries to defend his master with a sword (18:10). When Jesus is led away as a prisoner, Peter follows, refusing to let Jesus undergo this abuse by himself (18:15a).

But this great profile is overshadowed by his great failing at the high priest's house. Numerous lessons spin out from this. Despite Peter's prominence, despite his role as custodian of the faith and leader among the disciples, he can still deny it. This is a warning. Denial and faithlessness are always within reach for even the strongest disciple. I can understand Peter's denials as he stands by the fire feeling threatened by Malchus's relative and a circle of soldiers. But does he have to dispatch his faith the moment a young woman at the gate catches his sleeve? We dare not miss the pitifulness of this scene.

But perhaps what stands out in the Johannine story is Jesus' continued interest in Peter. We will see this again in chapter 21, but can anticipate it here. John reports that Jesus renews his relationship with Peter later when he meets him in Galilee ([21:1-17](#)). He is still a man deeply loved and forgiven, a man with work to do for his master.

It was the real Peter who protested his loyalty in the upper room; it was the real Peter who drew his lonely sword in the moonlight of the garden; it was the real Peter who followed Jesus, because he could not leave his Lord alone; it was *not* the real Peter who cracked beneath the tension and who denied his Lord. *And that is just what Jesus could see.*

...The forgiving love of Jesus is so great that He sees our real personality, not in our faithlessness, but in our loyalty, not in our defeat by sin, but in our reaching after goodness, even when we are defeated.

The betrayal of leadership. This is a story about collusion, not cooperation. This is *not* a story about priests and governors working amiably together for the public good. Of course Caiaphas, one of its chief actors, would like to make that claim: "You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" ([11:50](#)). But as readers of the story we know better—that the benefit this death brings is not what Caiaphas comprehends. Caiaphas was right—and terribly wrong; that is the essence of John's satire.

This is a story about collusion, about secret agreements with some fraudulent purpose, about conniving and conspiring. This is a story about the betrayal of leadership, how Judaism's high priests abandoned all pretense of devotion to God and decided instead to conspire with the military arm of Rome. Remarkably the leaders are willing to trade Barabbas for Jesus ([18:40](#)) and Caesar for God ([19:16](#)); their pursuit of

pragmatic goals makes them unable to discern the difference between a terrorist and a good shepherd, a statue of Tiberius and the God of Abraham. All Judaism did not reject Jesus— the crowds cheering him on Palm Sunday bear testimony to his many followers—but Judaism's leadership did everything in its power to sabotage his successes.

While it would be easy enough to chastise the Sanhedrin's behavior, tell its incriminating story, and outline its failure to uphold the excellent judicial system known in Jerusalem, John may yet have more to say to us. As we have seen multiple levels of meaning throughout this Gospel (the woman at the well is not just about Jewish and Samaritan worship, but our worship too, [4:21-24](#)), I am troubled to think that this story may have a similar *double entendre*.

The most obvious actor in this drama is Pilate. He wins the greatest number of lines and appears at almost every major scene that directly affects the outcome of Jesus' fate. Even though he was not at the arrest, he is in the background, represented by his troops. No governor at this season would send a detachment this size to arrest a man without studying the issues. When Jesus is finally handed to him after an entire night's interrogation, Pilate asks all the right questions, but for all the wrong reasons. When he hears the truth he disputes it; when he is challenged he makes a mockery even of the concept of truth. "What is truth?" ([18:38a](#)) has a sinister and contemporary ring to it, and this is how John intends for us to hear it.

With Pilate we unmask the secular betrayal of leadership that surrounds us at every turn. When asked to produce its moral compass, when examined on the basis of its virtues, we can hear the words of Pilate ringing again. "What is virtue?" "What is right?" "What is truth?" One of the most famous scenes of 1998 shows Bill Clinton asking, "What is sexual intercourse?" as his defense crumbles and he finally admits to having a lurid affair with Monica Lewinski. It is Pilate replayed for another century. Thirty years earlier we heard Lyndon Johnson talking publicly about a "just and lasting peace" as B52 bombers pounded

Vietnam. "What is peace?" was the question no one would answer. I was a Reserve Navy chaplain during the Gulf War in the early 1990s and recall pressing the moral virtue of carpet-bombing hundreds of thousands of forced conscripts on the Iraqi front, or starving hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children for many years with an embargo. "What is justice?" a senior Naval officer with four gold stripes asked me. He wore Pilate's uniform.

How often do the Pilates of our world pursue a course of pragmatism and expediency, protecting their own self-interest, using the rhetoric of righteousness, feigning an interest in truth—but when backed into a corner, when pressed to make a decision with social consequences, they crumble? "What is truth?" is the question you ask when truth is the last thing you want to hear. In the end, Pilate is of the "world" and so represents a system that is filled with darkness. He may intuit the light, as Pilate senses that something is wrong with this verdict, and he may make gestures toward truth, as when Pilate tries to free Jesus. But when the deal-makers arrive, when the pollsters report what it is that will secure the future, all commitments are tossed out like yesterday's newspaper. *Pilate killed Jesus*. He did not have the resolve to act on what his instincts were telling him ("I find no basis for a charge against him," [18:38](#)). *He is a failed leader*.

But the most disturbing profile in this climax to the Gospel belongs to Annas and Caiaphas, figures who almost merge in the narrative. Caiaphas is the catalyst, the mover, the inspired leader of the Sanhedrin, who is willing to tell them all they are ignorant ("You know nothing at all!" [11:49](#)) while he alone knows the secret of how to deal with Jesus. When word is out in the streets of Jerusalem that the leaders are seeking to kill Jesus ([7:19](#), [25](#)), we can sense Caiaphas' shadow in the background. At Jesus' arrest his temple guard serves alongside Pilate's soldiers. He even puts his small company of men under the leadership of Judas (a remarkable scene!) in order to bring Jesus into custody. It is Caiaphas who delivers Jesus to Pilate and from Jesus' point of view, Caiaphas will be held accountable for this decision ([19:11](#)).

It is curious that nowhere is Judas incriminated for his deed during these chapters. He is a lackey, a pawn in a larger game, and no doubt in Gethsemane he is summarily pushed to one side. Later when Jesus squares off with the true power-brokers of the temple, he has arrived at the nodal point of darkness.

The essence of Jesus' only interview with the temple leaders is that Jesus requests a fair trial. There is no theological debate (as in the Synoptics). We do not even hear Annas's voice. Jesus simply wants an honest hearing wherein the evidence can be displayed and witnesses heard. He wants the public things he has done made known so that everyone can see them and make a judgment. But Jesus does not get what he wants; his request is answered with a slap ([18:23](#)).

This request is *precisely* what we possess in the course of the *entire* Gospel. Signs, witnesses, discourses—all have been paraded before us so that we may make our judgment on the truth of Jesus. John has thus taken the essence of Jesus' trial and organized it into the structures of his Gospel. We now hold in eighteen chapters the material evidence against Jesus. Therefore *we know* the evidence accessible to these leaders; *we know* the basis of their judgment; as we read the Gospel, we stand with these leaders, weighing what Jesus has said and done. As we hear the tone of chapters 5, 8 and 10, we can hear echoes of the tone that flew at Jesus during his late-night interrogation.

With Caiaphas and Annas we unmask the religious betrayal of leadership. But when we read between the lines, we learn that in the end theology does *not* matter for these men. Caiaphas is concerned about the preservation of the state and the outcome of politics ([11:50](#)). His lieutenants are primed to call for Barabbas's freedom as quickly as they can call for Jesus' crucifixion. They have done their homework. When they see Pilate vacillating, they play political hardball ([19:12](#)), issuing a fatal threat to the man's career and labeling Jesus as a genuine enemy of the empire. Their final words on this stage appear at [19:15](#), where they

hoist up their patriotic flag higher than the highest temple rampart, putting Caesar above God.

What can we make of these men? This is *more* than a story about the miscarriage of justice. It is more than a disturbing parable of an innocent man dying without justice. This is a story of religious corruption, of spiritual leaders who slaughter the sheep and ruin the flock (cf. [Ezek. 34](#)). This is the story of priests who have bent the knee before Rome, not the temple; who have viewed God's people as a power base, a social construct, a force among other political forces, an agent of change in the politics of change, and themselves as worthy brokers with the pagan power-broker from the Roman Senate. In their secret conspiracy to eliminate one man, a man who could upset their carefully-built equilibrium, they sacrifice their souls.

In the end, they are in the world as much as Pilate is; yet, disturbingly, they do not show any of Pilate's reserve or regret. Being trained experts at ethics they know how ethics can be bent; being theologians adept at religious language, they know how to manipulate it for public consumption. *Caiaphas is a parable as much as he is a man*. He is a Christian in Washington cutting deals with political action groups. He is a theologian at denominational headquarters winning respectability by cutting out ancient and cherished beliefs— no, revising them for the modern world in order to gain the respect of Caesar, in order to make the church palatable for the world. *Caiaphas kills Jesus*. In his theological wisdom and hard-earned ecclesiastical prestige, he has lost sight of God. *He is a failed leader.*

- NIV Application Commentary

CLOSE:

From the example of our Saviour we should learn how to receive our lighter afflictions, and to ask ourselves whether we ought to oppose our Father's will, or to distrust his love. We were bound with the cords of our iniquities, with the yoke of our transgressions. Christ, being made a sin-offering for us, to free us

from those bonds, himself submitted to be bound for us. To his bonds we owe our liberty; thus the Son makes us free.

- Matthew Henry

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