

The King's Mission - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **John 18:19-40** (#506)

Introduction: One of the most wonderful parts about our faith is that Jesus does the work. He is the One who has lived the perfect, sinless life. He is the One who endured the trials, the brutal whipping and crucifixion; He is the One who died and was buried. Unlike any other faith or religion on this planet, our God has lived and died in our place, for our sins. We can't add anything to His sacrifice, we can't take any of His work upon ourselves.

Now, to be clear, we are called to apply Christ's work to our lives by how we follow Him and hold to His teachings. Jesus teaches that faithfulness is not merely a matter of acknowledging what He did and then going about our own lives however we feel. No: He tells the woman caught in adultery "go and sin no more," and that applies to us no less. He tells the disciples to "go and make disciples," and so we – too – go about the mission of being and making disciples.

So there are many applications in the Christian life, many ways in which how we live and think and dream need to change, need to conform to Christ. But this morning, in **John 18**, we'll see something that only our Lord can do. Whatever other applications we have, simply trusting Him, believing in what He is accomplishing even in these verses, and then responding with thank-filled worship are the most central and appropriate responses. Let's pick up the story in **verse 19** and see what our Lord will do for His own glory, and for His followers...

18:19-24 Earlier in the chapter, Jesus was arrested, even in spite of Peter's best sword-fighting efforts. In fact, throughout the first eighteen verses, John has been very clear to show us that everything is going according to plan – God's plan! As we move deeper into this chapter – and, indeed, into the chapters which follow – keep that in mind: this is God's work and it is unfolding exactly as He has determined that it should.

This second half of the **chapter 18** seems to have four movements to it. Here, in these verses, we read of Jesus being questioned by Annas. Many of your Bibles

will have a title beginning this section, saying something like “The High Priest Questions Jesus.” And if you remember earlier, you might be confused: isn’t Caiaphas the High Priest (**v13**)? And the answer is, yes – technically. I’ll leave the long explanation to the notes in your study Bibles, but ultimately the role of the High Priest had turned into something of a political one, with various people stepping into it – at this point – for a one-year term. This led to the situation where there would be people still living, still on the council, and still powerful who had been High Priest in the past. So it is here with Annas and Caiaphas. As a show of honor to Annas, Christ is taken before him first.

In this scene, I want you to notice what Annas is getting at: John tells us that his questions revolved around who was following Jesus and what our Lord was teaching to those followers. As we have so often seen in John’s gospel, Christ’s response is masterful: rather than defending Himself, He simply points Annas to everyone who has witnessed what Jesus has been doing over the past few years. Christ’s teachings are no secret, and it seems likely that Annas had a pretty good idea already of what Jesus was about. Personally, I see this line of questioning as bait, a trap to try and find some way to condemn Jesus even though there is literally no evidence against Him or against what He has been doing.

Though Annas’ staff try to cowl and humiliate Jesus, He remains firm: if He has done something wrong, then point it out. Of course, Annas has nothing to hold against our Lord, and so – without any other direction to take things – he sends Jesus to Caiaphas, the current high priest.

Note what Annas has left unsaid: he has nothing to accuse Jesus of. No evidence to bring against Him, no way to prosecute this teacher that he so hates. And that should give you and I great hope: if what we need most is a Savior from our sins, a Savior who is perfect in every way that we are not, one without any spot or blemish, then we have such a Savior in Christ. Even those most opposed to Him can find no actual crime to charge Him with. Christ really is this good, this pure. You can trust Him and He will never disappoint. Do you trust Him? Have you?

The scene will now switch from Jesus to Peter. Keep in mind that John's record of these events is a bit different from the other gospels – the same facts are, of course, happening, but John highlights things that the others don't. If you'd like some help putting all the pieces together, I'd suggest you take an hour or so and read through the relevant chapters of each of the four Gospels to get the overall scene. For our purposes, though, I think John is highlighting these particular points for a purpose. Let's see it with Peter...

18:25-27 Peter has already denied Christ once, back in **verse 17**. Now – just as Jesus predicted – Peter will do so two more times. In each case, he denies that he is a follower of Christ. Here, to those standing around the fire with him. Lastly, when one of the servants of the high priest questions him. It's important to realize that this servant was a relative of Malchus, the one whose ear Peter cut off. Perhaps, the rumor mill has already traveled fast through the palace. Or perhaps this particular servant was also in the garden at Christ's arrest. In either case, I think we are seeing the fallout of Peter's sword-practice: just as Jesus said it was the wrong move then, so we see some of the consequences now. By the way, that might be something to keep in mind: rarely – if ever – does Christ call for His servants to use strength or force to accomplish our disciple making mission. So often it is through weakness that we are made strong: Christ's strength and our weakness.

Here, note the radical difference between Peter and Jesus. Whereas Christ is questioned and comes away as clean and pure as fresh snow, Peter is the exact opposite. He has his own trial, as it were, and he fails miserably. Beware: so often the challenges to our faith don't come from the sorts of things that movies are made of. I suspect that few, if any, of us will be called to stand for our faith in the arena or before executioners. Instead, note the danger for Peter here: he is under no threat at all. Warming himself, listening in. None of those who have challenged him have the power to do anything to him. The officials of the high priest don't have arrest warrants out for the disciples. No, in Christ, they have the man they want. Peter was under little-to-no threat, and yet that is the very point that he failed at. This gives a warning for you and I also: sometimes it is when life is easy,

when it's going well, when it's simpler just to downplay the faith and get along – sometimes those are the instances when the danger to faithfulness is greatest.

First Jesus, then Peter. Let's catch up with Christ again, this time as the leaders hand Him over to Pilate (after His hearing with Caiaphas, **Matthew 26:57**).

18:28-32 Pilate is the Roman governor at this point. Israel is, largely, an occupied territory, one in which the Romans preserve order and exact taxes, while still keeping the Jewish leadership in place to keep everything running.

Early in the morning, Jesus is taken to the governor's headquarters. John spends quite a few words explaining something deeply saddening: these religious officials who are trying to unjustly kill Jesus – which is definitely against God's law – are, ironically, worried about defiling themselves during the ongoing Passover feast. Friends, let's beware of committing a similar sin ourselves, thinking that we can ignore some parts of God's law and yet hold tightly to others. We are warned against being hypocrites in the Scriptures, we are called to be whole-hearted followers of Jesus. Let's not pick and choose which laws to follow or which causes to support. Instead, when you and I fail, cry out to the Lord for forgiveness, and then move forward with a plan to be found faithful in the future.

The priests' lack of evidence against Jesus comes to a head here, when Pilate asks what they are accusing Him of. The answer, in **verse 30**, is about as slippery as it comes: in essence, "we wouldn't bring this man to you unless He were doing something bad." The priests clearly just want Pilate to take their word for it and pronounce a judgment against Jesus. The reason for this is spelled out: as Pilate tries to cast the whole situation back into the lap of the priests, John reminds us of their real agenda: they want Christ put to death. And this is exactly what they cannot do: under Roman law, the Jews are not allowed to impose the death penalty on anyone.

John points out in **verse 32** that this fulfills yet another prophecy, this one spoken by Christ earlier, in **John 12:32-33**. It's as if the author is reminding us readers that though things look bad, they are happening just as God has planned.

Earlier, Christ taught that His disciples would endure the same sort of persecution that He Himself went through. If history is any guide, that was likely true; with the vast majority of the disciples dying the horrible death of a martyr at some point or another. We, likewise, need to understand that we'll suffer for being Christians, also. Perhaps our persecution will look different – maybe economic or social – but then again, it may well not. Many Christians are killed for their faith around the world each year, even now. That this isn't common here in the U.S. is a wonderful mercy, but not something that is guaranteed to be the case forever.

Yet, just like the early church states in **Acts 5** – after enduring persecution of their own – even such hard times can be seen in a different light: they can be seen as evidence of being in Christ. There we read: “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.” Ask the Lord to make you willing to suffer dishonor on His account, too.

Let's close our time with another “questioning,” this time by Pilate...

18:33-40 Pilate and Jesus spar a bit, don't they? Pilate seems to want little to do with this situation, yet he feels that he has to address it for the sake of order. Jesus sees Pilate for the puppet that he is. Yet, in this conversation, something remarkable emerges: Jesus really is a King, but not the sort of king that Pilate imagines or fears. Christ's power is great, but His kingdom was not yet coming in all of its fullness. Instead of reigning right then, Christ's mission was different: it was to testify to what is true. Pilate's true colors are shown with his question “What is truth?” Yet, Christ had just said that “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” In short, Pilate is no more righteous than the wicked and corrupt priests who have handed Christ over. He doesn't listen to Christ's voice. So, despite some feeble efforts to release Jesus, we find Pilate – ultimately – bowing to the crowd and condemning an innocent man. But not before John points out

the last change, the last twist: Christ will not be released. He will die as a criminal, even though there are no real charges against Him. On the other hand, Barabbas – a robber and rebel – shall be set free. Without saying anything about Barabbas' own beliefs, the picture here is clear: Christ shall die for sinners, trading His life for theirs, His righteousness for their sinfulness. He shall take the full punishment upon Himself so that all who trust Him as Savior shall have eternal life.

Is that eternal life something that you have? Something you cherish? If you aren't sure, then you can be: simply admit that you are a sinner and that Jesus is the only One who can save you. Pray and call to Him, asking Him to rescue you from your sins. And then confess Him as Lord. That is how you can know that His work will be applied to you.

Oh, and one more point: Christ's kingdom is not of this world. I daresay that this difference really ought to be more evident with how churches function, what we value, how we go about ministry. If we seek the things that the world prizes – money, influence, numbers – then we might well get those, but we'll lose our distinctive witness. Yet if we seek the kingdom that is above, then we may or may not be influential in this world, but we will bear true witness to the One King. Let's act like the ambassadors that we are, telling those around us of the home that we shall someday know in fullness, of the hope for a world that is best, even better than the greatest achievements of this earth. That is how we follow our Savior. Here, now, in this moment: let's simply praise Him for His perfections, His grace, His courage, and His love – given to us...