

John 18:15-27

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[0 : 00] As we approach Easter, I want us to focus on the passage Graham just read to you, John 18 verses 15 through to 27. Please do keep your Bible open and look at it with me.

That will help you check that what I'm saying actually is not from me, but ultimately from the Bible, from God. And it is God speaking to us. As we pick up here in John chapter 18, Jesus has just been arrested and faces his first trial before the Jewish religious leaders.

Meanwhile, Peter, who's out in the courtyard, again he's just sliced the ear off some of it when Jesus was being arrested, actually faces a rather more informal trial of his own.

And throughout the entire chapter, more than just what we're looking at this lunchtime, John switches our attention back and forth between Jesus and Peter.

He starts with Jesus, then he goes to Peter, then back to Jesus, then back to Peter, then back to Jesus. It says John is deliberately putting up these two characters, more than characters of course, so that we might compare and contrast them together.

[1 : 16] And just over the next 20 minutes or so, I just want to look at this little instant as we really begin to remember the events of Easter over the week and the weekend ahead.

And I want to do that by asking you a particular question this lunchtime. That question is this one. Who are you willing to die for?

Who are you willing to die for? Now I know it's a rather blunt question. It's perhaps you think it's a very surprising question.

And anybody would ask that question today. But actually if we were an evening 70 years ago, as the Second World War was coming to an end, that would not have been a surprising question. It would have been a question that everybody back then would have had to come to terms with. Today I suspect it's a question that's rarely asked. Perhaps only if you're planning to join the army, perhaps.

[2 : 19] But that's what we're looking at. This lunchtime we're going to look at Peter first and then Jesus. And as we start with Peter, we're really looking at who is Peter willing to die for?

Because the answer actually turns out to be nobody. Peter turns out to be the faithless disciple who bottled his own witness so that he could save his own skin.

Look with me in verse 15. Simon, Peter and another disciple. That's in all likelihood John, our author. They're following Jesus after he's arrested.

John is somehow known to the high priest. And so John can get into the courtyard, the high priest's courtyard where Jesus is under trial. But Peter has to stay outside.

He's obviously not allowed in. Look again at verse 16. Look at the second half of verse 16.

[3 : 29] So the other disciple who was known to the high priest, again John chooses to tell us twice. That the other disciple, that's presumably himself, he's known to the high priest.

The implication I trust is that Peter wasn't. And that's why John was allowed in. But Peter wasn't.

And whenever a gospel writer tells us something twice in two verses, it's always a good idea to ask ourselves why.

Why is that so important? Which we'll be looking at as well. Anyway, John comes back and speaks to the girl on duty so that he can bring Peter inside.

She knows that John is one of Jesus' disciples. And as she observes John's relationship with Peter, she's putting two and two together and asks Peter that question there in verse 17.

You also are not one of his disciples, are you? This is Peter's test. Right here. Now he may not have been expecting it.

[4 : 32] He may have thought he'd been watching somebody else's test and trial. But this has turned out to be his trial. But instead of being a faithful witness to his relationship with Jesus, he

bottles it.

There he replies at the end of verse 17. He said, I am not. Now remember, we've just been told that John is known to the high priest.

The girl on the door knows that John is one of Jesus' disciples. If it's safe for John to be inside and to be known as one of Jesus' disciples, then I think it's a pretty fair assumption that at this point at least, it would have been safe for Peter to have actually confessed that he was a disciple of Jesus. But then, if you've ever been in a similar situation to Peter, frozen like him as a rabbit, say, caught in the headlights of a car, then you know as well as I do that rational thinking often gives way to panic in those situations.

And it's panic that leads us not to being the faithful disciple we should be. And to missing the opportunities we've given to witness to others about Jesus.

[5 : 55] And I don't know about you this lunchtime, but all too often, for my own liking, I find myself more or less like Peter here. Well, John's narrative there at the end of verse 18 leaves Peter warming himself by the open fire.

And John wants to switch her attention to Jesus, but we're going to stick on with Peter just for another minute or two. And before, as we jump ahead to verse 25, and as you see there at the beginning of the verse 25, John picks up the scene again with Simon Peter still standing there and warming himself.

John's account of Peter's second denial. He's extremely brief. But for the second time, Peter replies, I am not. When he's asked if he's also one of Jesus' disciples.

But the focus there in verse 26 is to one individual, in particular to the one guy who challenges Peter for the third time. John tells us that it's another of the servants of the high priest.

It's a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off while Jesus was being arrested there in verse 10 earlier on in the chapter. And what's worse from Peter's perspective is that this man thinks he saw Peter in the olive grove.

[7 : 19] So I think at this time, it's probably fair to say Peter might well be in genuine trouble. If I were Peter there and then, or if you were Peter there now, we wouldn't be pretty sure to be wondering, what else did this guy see in that olive grove?

Did he see Peter brandishing the sword? Did he see the blue? Did he see the blood and hear the screams of his relative? As his ear fell off and landed on the ground and the blood spurted out. What else did this man see? I'm sure Peter is wondering at this point. And if Peter was not yet panicking by this stage, I'm pretty sure he would be right now.

I, speaking here, have a lot of sympathy for Peter. I suspect if I was in the same situation as he was, I probably would have denied Jesus just as much as he did.

Nevertheless, he still is a faithless disciple. He still is a disciple who bottled his witness to save his own skin.

[8 : 35] And it's all the more significant because earlier on in the same night, Peter pledged his life to Jesus. John recorded it earlier in chapter 13 and verse 37.

There, earlier on in the same night, Peter insists that he will lay down his life for Jesus. Jesus, though, was fully aware back then that Peter, actually this would happen.

Peter would bottle it. Immediately after Jesus, sorry, Peter, says that to Jesus, Jesus replies, and I quote from verse 38 of chapter 13, just a few pages earlier.

Then Jesus answered, Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not grow till you have denied me three times.

Well, back in chapter 18 and verse 37, what happens after Peter's third denial? John records there in verse 27, Peter again denied it.

[9 : 34] And at once, a cock crew. See, Jesus was right about Peter. His disciple Peter, so apparently committed earlier on the same evening, would later on bottled.

Simply to save each of the skin. Well, in contrast to Peter, here is Jesus.

And as we've asked earlier, who was Peter willing to die for? And the answer was nobody. We ask the same question of Jesus. Who was Jesus willing to die for?

We're in verses 19 to 24. The Jewish religious leaders have put Jesus on trial before him. And there in verse 19, they question Jesus to try and find some secret, incriminating evidence against him.

But Jesus will have none of it. His replies to point to his public witness in the synagogues and in the temple, rather than some sort of secret conspiracy.

[10:38] Everybody knows what Jesus has been saying. Everybody knows how Jesus has been witnessing to God's truth. Look with me there at verse 21, is Jesus' reply.

Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard me what I said to them. They know what I said. Let them see that here in John's a kind piece, actually what Jesus did say.

It's about Jesus' faithful witness to his God. That actually these religious leaders are actually far from God. Jesus' faithful witness that their religion, well, it's only for sure.

And Jesus' faithful witness that unless these religious leaders repent, they too will face God's judgment for their own sins. And that is precisely why they had Jesus arrested.

It wasn't because he was doing some sort of secret conspiracy. It's because he was standing out in the open, in the public presses, telling them that they need to repent and change their lives.

[11:51] That's why instead of debating with Jesus, they resort to violence as one of them strikes Jesus in the face. But look with me at how Jesus challenges them next in verse 23.

Jesus answered him, If I said what is wrong, bear witness about the wrong. But if what I said is right, why do you strike me?

See, if they could demonstrate that Jesus has done something wrong, this is their opportunity to justify what they're doing. But actually, it's their silence reveals here that they couldn't.

They couldn't pin anything on Jesus. Later on, if we were to continue the story when Jesus was in front of Pilate, we see actually three times Pilate telling people, I find no basis for a charge against this guy.

He's innocent. Yet here he is under trial. Not because he's objectively guilty of any crime, not because he's somehow sinful, but actually because these chief priests were offended that he would dare proclaim God's witness against them as he tells them about what God thinks of them and God's indictment against them.

[13:12] I hope you see just briefly in our time together that Jesus here is standing in stark contrast to Peter. Jesus' faithful witness to God actually would cost Jesus his life.

Jesus was willing to die for his witness to God. Whereas Peter, where he bottled his own witness to Jesus to save his own skin.

As we approach Easter at the weekend, we rightly remember that central gospel truth that Jesus died to save us from our sins.

The Savior sweeps by swapping places with us. The innocent one, Jesus, took the sins and the guilt of the guilty one you, me, and the like of Peter here.

And what I find striking here, and I hope you do as well this lunchtime, is that Jesus knew that Peter would fail him long before he's at rest. What's striking is at the very moment when Peter is failing Jesus, the faithful Jesus is going to the cross to pay for that failure.

[14:40] And what's striking here is that Jesus' faithful witness, in essence, he's wiping out Peter's failure to witness as he should here.

I don't know, I think I only know one or two of you here this lunchtime. Perhaps you're here this lunchtime and you're already a disciple of Jesus. You know that his death has purchased your forgiveness.

And yet perhaps you're still feeling guilty for those times that you know you've let Jesus die. You know that you've bottled your witness in the workplace or with your neighbours and feel to take the opportunities that have come your way to speak with Jesus.

That's you. And actually you're in the same position as Peter here. Actually you're in the same position as probably all of us. Because we're all like Peter.

As Jesus is dying here for Peter, for Peter's faithlessness in witnessing so is Jesus dying for our others as well.

[15:53] In John chapter 21 we don't have time to return to it. Jesus, the resurrected Jesus wonderfully forgives all of Peter's faithlessness here. Wonderfully recommissions him for a life of service.

Wonderfully tells him that he's going to be his witness to the ends of the earth. And it's these events as Peter's denial as he's experienced of the cross of Jesus on the cross as experience of resurrection Sunday.

As experience of being forgiven that actually transforms Peter. From being the guy who bottled his witness to the guy in the rest of his life who would be a faithful witness for Jesus.

The guy who ultimately church history for his paid his own life for his witness to Jesus. But actually as I close this lunchtime John chapter 18 is not primarily about Peter.

It's primarily about Jesus. It would be wrong if I were to leave you here this lunchtime if you just thought about Peter and didn't think even more about Jesus here.

[17 : 08] Because the most important question this passage asks is not who are you willing to die for which is what I began with but ultimately who was Jesus Christ willing to die for.

That's the question we need to be asking this Easter time. Here in this part of John chapter 18 we see afresh Jesus willing to die for his father God.

To keep proclaiming who God is in God's character to these religious leaders. And here in this part of John 18 we see afresh Jesus willing to die for people like Peter.

His faithless disciple who is good at promising to do things for Jesus but struggles to put them into practice. He was Jesus Christ willing to die for.

Well it was for God and it was for still flawed disciples like Peter those who have bottled it in the past those who have been out to sea of their own skins in the past so that he might forgive them and transform them and make them more like Jesus here.

[18 : 31] This Easter time who was Jesus willing to die for? Can you put your name on in the answer to that question? For still flawed disciples maybe you're not even a disciple yet because he came to die for you and for me to rescue us from our sins and to transform our witness for him so that we might live for him for the rest of our lives hallelujah let's pray and him and he he he he!

he he he!