

VCEFC Daily Devotion April 10 to April 16, 06

April 10 John 18: 1-11 Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?

Notes:

- v. 1-2 After Jesus has uttered the preceding discourses and prayer He goes out of the house with His disciples to a garden. They are accustomed to staying at night in the garden during the period leading up to the festival. Since the garden was a favorite place for Jesus and His disciples, Judas knew the place. It was easy for him to lead the authorities to Jesus at a time when they could arrest Him without notice by the crowds gathering for the Passover festival in Jerusalem.
- v. 3 The Roman soldiers (representing the Gentile world) and the officials from the Jewish religious authority (representing the Jewish nation) join forces to arrest Jesus. In the darkness and guided by Judas, they come with lanterns, torches and weapons to arrest the "light of the world".
- v. 4-6 Jesus knows that the hour of His suffering has arrived. It is the hour ordained by the Father. Jesus takes the initiative to ask the soldiers and the police whom they want. When Jesus identifies Himself as "I am", the authorities fall backward in awe because they are in the presence of God.
- v. 7-9 Jesus manifests not only His spiritual authority before His enemies but also His concern as Shepherd for His own: "Let these men go." Jesus is not seized by force, but He lays down His life for His friends by negotiating their freedom.
- v. 10-11 Peter has very little comprehension of the passion of Jesus, that he wants to use his own way to save Jesus. In contrast, Jesus is ready to drink the bitter cup of suffering and death in obedience to the Father.

Meditate:

1. In what ways does this arrest scene make it clear that Jesus is in control of the situation?
2. Jesus, the good Shepherd, gives up His freedom for the freedom of His flock. How are you going to respond to His love?

April 11: John 18: 12-18 Are you one of His disciples?

Notes:

- v. 12-13 Only the Gospel of John mentions that Jesus was taken first to Annas, who was clearly an immensely influential person among the Jewish leadership. He had been high priest A. D. 6-15. No less than five of his sons and a grandson became high priests, and Caiaphas was his son-in-law, his family thus had a monopoly of the high-priestly office during the period A.D. 17-41. Annas accordingly will have held a patriarchal position in the high-priestly circles, not least in the period when Caiaphas held office.
- V. 14 John especially highlights Caiaphas' earlier remarks to remind the readers that Jesus will die for the benefit of the people.
- V. 15-16 The information that Peter was accompanied by another disciple, who was a friend of the High Priest and who secured his entry into the High Priest's courtyard, is unique to John's Gospel.
- v. 17-18 When Jesus was arrested, He said, "I am" three times (18:5, 6, 8). Now Peter, who confidently stated that he would die for Jesus (13:36-38), is asked if he

is one of Jesus' disciples. His answer is "I am not", and then he turns, stands with the police and others, warming himself beside the charcoal fire in the middle of a cold night.

Meditate: Have you ever betrayed or denied Jesus by your words or deeds? What price you are willing to pay for testifying for the truth?

April 12 John 18: 19-27

- v. 19-21 The interrogation of Jesus by Annas and the sharp answer of Jesus to him call for some explanation. In any court inquiry among Jews the correct procedure was to call witnesses, not to question the accused. Jewish judges did not enquire of the accused, but of the witnesses. On their testimony everything depended. If two witnesses agreed in essentials, then the accused was doomed, no matter what he might say in his defense. Jesus accordingly is justified in objecting to the procedure and demanding a proper trial.
- v. 22-24 When one of the temple officers suddenly strikes Jesus for talking back to the high priest, Jesus asks for justice. He has nothing to hide, and demands that they produce witnesses prepared to testify on oath in open court. Annas therefore brings the examination to an end and sends Jesus on to Caiaphas to see what he can do.
- v. 25-27 Outside the courtyard, Peter denies his relationship with Jesus two more times. After his third denial, the cock crowed. Since the Gospel of John always emphasizes the important of public confession, Peter is a sad example of discipleship. Peter does not seem to be under any threat of persecution. He just denies Jesus out of fear. He has tried to follow Jesus, but fails to follow all the way. He is not willing to lay down his life for Jesus. In contrast to Peter, Jesus is tied up and abused, yet He speaks openly and truthfully.

Meditate: As Jesus is bearing witness to the truth with steadfast trust in God, and is enduring unjust treatments, His chief disciple, Peter, undergoes a similar test with much lesser degree of threats- and fails. Fear for his life leads Peter to deny knowing Jesus, the one who at that very moment is giving an unswerving testimony that will lead to His death. Peter's emerging, though weak, faith is a clear sign that only the risen Lord- the one who speaks the truth from above- can bring us beyond our weaknesses and fears and enable us to give as powerful a testimony as Jesus gave. Ask Jesus to strengthen you to boldly bear witness for Him.

"Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Hebrews 12: 3.

April 13: John 18: 28-32 The irony

Notes:

- v. 28 It was common for the Roman officials to begin work early and complete their business as soon as possible. The Jewish leaders refuse to enter the governor's residence in order to avoid ceremonial uncleanness in accordance with the dictum, "The dwellings of non-Jews are unclean." But the insistence of the high priests on maintaining it in this circumstance entails the extreme irony: they hold fast to the ceremonial law while they seek the execution of the promised Deliverer of Israel, the Son of God and Savior, and in their zeal to eat the

passover lamb they unwittingly help to fulfill its significance through their demanding the death of the Lamb of God, at the same time shutting themselves out from its saving efficacy.

- V. 29-30 Some conversation may have taken place between the Jewish leaders and Pilate concerning Jesus before His arrest (cf. the assistance of Roman soldiers at the arrest of Jesus). Pilate naturally asks for the official charge to be presented against Jesus by the high priests. Their response is extraordinarily vague. It is possible that, having already consulted Pilate concerning Jesus, they expect that he would not trouble to investigate further, but would simply rubber-stamp their decision.
- V. 31 Pilate's reply is both ironic and humiliating for the Jewish leaders. For if Jesus has offended their laws, they have to judge Jesus according to their laws. If they want to put Him to death they have to speak up and state their case clearly.
- v. 32 The Jews want Jesus to die at the hands of the Romans (crucifixion) instead of stoning Him to death because this mode of execution entailed the curse of the Law, "Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse" (Deut. 21:23) The chief priests clearly wish to ensure that Jesus is not viewed as a martyr for God's cause, but as an impostor who dies under the curse of God. By contrast John sees in the death of Jesus by crucifixion God's way of fulfilling his purpose to lift up Jesus in the glory of divine love to enthronement with Himself, thereby the saving sovereignty is opened for all the world, and the exalted Lord can draw all who will into the eternal life of the kingdom of God.

Meditate: The refusal of Jesus' enemies to enter the palace for fear of uncleanness shows itself to be absurd: They are at that moment handing Jesus over to be put to death! How ironic! It shows how people can be religious but immoral and sinning against God at the same time. Reflect: Does your faith instruct your actions?

April 14: John 18:33-40 My Kingdom is not of this world

Notes:

- v. 33-34 Under normal circumstances, Pilate would interrogate the accuser, the accused, any witnesses, and then declare the verdict and the penalty if the accused is found guilty. He begins with the question, "Are you the King of the Jews?" because if Jesus' answer is positive, Pilate has a basis for a verdict of treason or insurrection. However, Jesus turns matters around by putting Pilate on trial. He asks Pilate for a decision about His identity because the real issue is whether Pilate will acknowledge Jesus' identity and believe in Him.
- V. 35 In responding to Jesus' question, Pilate at once disclaims any interest in peculiar Jewish notions and denies any reason to know anything about Jesus other than what people have told him. He is dissatisfied with the Jewish accusations, and is eager to know what Jesus has done to make the rulers so intent on His execution.
- V. 36 When Jesus says that His kingship is not of this world., He is contrasting two spheres with two different modes of operations. This world operates on the basis of deadly force, and Jesus offers life and persuades others by the word of truth, seeking to serve God in the power of the Spirit of love.

- V. 37 Jesus affirms that His kingdom is the Kingdom of truth. He was born and came into the world with a mission to bear witness to the truth of God's salvation, and to reveal it in word and deed. Facing Jesus' revelation of the Kingdom of truth, Pilate is placed in a situation of decision as to the truth that gives men a part in the kingdom of salvation.
- V. 38-39 Pilate responds negatively to Jesus' invitation. He does not find Jesus a threat to the Roman rule and he wants to close the case by asking the Jews to release Jesus according to the custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover festival, so as to save face for the Jewish leaders.
- V. 40 The leaders of Israel and their supporters make their decision: they ask for the release of one who had been guilty of violent political assault against the state, entailing murder, and demand the death of Him who came to realize the nation's true destiny through the almighty but peaceful divine love.

Meditate:

1. When Pilate asks Jesus: "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus answers, "Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about me?" You may have heard many people talking about Jesus, but what is your own idea of Him?
2. "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." Are you on the side of truth?
3. Why did the people want to release Barabbas instead of Jesus?

April 15: John 19:1-3 The suffering of our Lord

Notes:

- v. 1 Having failed with the plan to release Him through the amnesty custom, Pilate now seeks to satisfy the Jews' desire that Jesus be punished, but in a lesser drastic way than by crucifixion- he takes Jesus and has him flogged. The Roman mode of flogging was extremely terrible: "The delinquent was stripped, bound to a post or a pillar, or sometimes simply thrown on the ground, and beaten by a number of torturers until the latter grew tired and the flesh of the delinquent hung in bleeding shreds. In the provinces this was the task of soldiers. Three different kinds of implements were customary. Rods were used on freemen; military punishments were inflicted with sticks, but for slaves scourges or whips were used, the leather thongs of these being often fitted with a spike or with several pieces of bone or lead joined to form a chain. The scourging of Jesus was carried out with these last-named instruments...It is not surprising to hear that delinquents frequently collapsed and died under this procedure, which only in exceptional cases was prescribed as a death sentence... Josephus records that he himself had some of his opponents in Galilean Tarichae scourged until their entrails were visible. The case of Jesus bar Hanan, the prophet of woe, whom the procurator Albinus had scourged until his bones lay bare." It is generally believed that the suffering of this severe scourging was the reason why Jesus was unable to carry His cross all the way to His execution, and why He died so soon after being crucified.
- V. 2-3 The crown that the soldiers made, though primarily intended as a caricature and not as an instrument of torture, will have been unspeakably painful. Its form will have been an imitation of the radiate crown of the divine rulers. It was most likely made from great thorns of the date palm, which were easily

available. The appearance of the crown was like an American Indian's headdress, with thorns as large as the feathers. The use of such a crown signifies that Jesus was decked out as a king who was God. We are to assume that He was seated, like a King on His throne. His purple cloak, which may have been only an old shaggy rug, represented the royal dress of a king. The soldiers bowed the knee to Him, as they would before a Hellenistic ruler of that time. But instead of the kiss of homage they spat at Him and slapped his face.

Meditate: Why did Jesus endure such horrible suffering? What does it mean to you?

April 16: John 19:4-7 "I found no basis for a charge against Him"

Notes:

- v. 4-5 Once again Pilate wants to win the Jews' approval of releasing Jesus instead of Barabbas. In declaring Jesus innocent and bringing the heavily wounded Jesus to their sight, Pilate may want to demonstrate the harmlessness of Jesus, so that they should drop their accusation. Dressed in His wretched clothes that made Him look more like a crown than a king, bleeding profusely, in pain and in bruised face through the additional beatings, Jesus must have looked a shocking sight, enough to horrify any who knew Him.
- V. 6 Pilate fails to convince the Jews to release Jesus. The high priests and their followers shout that He should be crucified. Pilate's answer expresses both his anger and disgust at their unrelenting attitude toward Jesus and himself, and his own refusal to do what they ask, since he knows very well that Jesus is innocent.
- V. 7 The priests are referring to a law in Leviticus that says, "One who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death (Leviticus 24:16). Jesus is accused of blasphemy because He offered Himself to the people as the Son of God (5:18; 10:33-36).

Meditate: As readers of the Gospel, we are asked to look at the humiliation of the man Jesus, decked in thorns and wrapped in a mock royal robe. But we are also asked to look beyond His humiliation, and with the eyes of faith, see the one who has come from God and, soon, will return to God, having completed God's saving mission in the world.