

31. John 18:15-27

Getting started

Have you ever been scared to give an account of your faith?

Observations

1. What is happening in this section? *[John develops two themes and also progresses the story. The two themes are the betrayal by Peter, and the question of what is the truth.]*
2. Does Jesus answer the question in verse 19? Is Jesus being deliberately evasive, or what is he trying to do? *[Jesus doesn't accept that the Jewish authorities should be questioning him. He knows they have corrupt motives. He also knows his testimony would not be admissible as evidence, as under Jewish law it is witnesses, not the accused, who should be questioned. So he is challenging the legitimacy of their questioning.]*

Interpretation

1. Why does John mention who was with Jesus? *[The mention of Peter is important for the theme of betrayal, and the mention of the unnamed disciple helps us believe that this account is given by a witness who was there and saw these things.]*
2. What impression is conveyed by John mentioning that a 'girl' asked Jesus if he was one of Jesus' disciples? *[Peter, who had boldly said he would die for Jesus (13:37), is now scared of a young child.]*
3. Why do you think Jesus was questioned? Was the High Priest interested in the answer?
4. What is implied in Jesus' answer? *[He has nothing to hide and if the High Priest wants to convict him, he will have to get the evidence. There is also an implicit accusation in the questioning by the Chief Priest. False prophets were thought to do their evil work in private, and Jesus is keen to challenge this implied accusation that he is a false prophet. He says that they already know his teaching. He has been speaking boldly and openly.]*
5. It appears that the High Priest did not reply to Jesus' question in verse 23. Can you think why? *[John is showing that the answer would be inconsistent with the way he was being treated. It helps build the sense of the injustice of Jesus' trial and death.]*

6. Why mention the relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off? *[One reason would be so the truth of the story could be later verified.]*
7. Who do you think is the original source of this part of the story? *[Probably the unnamed disciple in verse 15.]*
8. Why does the fire figure so prominently in the story? Is it just an insignificant detail? *[Hardly anything is insignificant in John's gospel! Look at the story of Peter's restoration by Jesus in chapter 21. There is a fire there. The fire links the betrayal with Jesus' providing fish in abundance. It would trigger memories in Peter of his betrayal of Jesus. Yet, Jesus shows there is nothing to fear from the one who forgives.]*
9. How does this story help develop an answer to John's central question, who is Jesus?

Implications

1. Did Jesus get justice from the High Priests? If not, what does that mean for us? Should we expect justice?
2. Consider what you have learnt so far about Jesus in John's gospel. How does this fit with the way the Priests treat him?
3. Is it OK to ask questions about Jesus? *[Jesus says it is, as long as we look at the evidence. He is also saying that this revelation of the Word is now given into the hands of human witnesses, like you and me. Jesus entrusts into our hands his work of teaching, of proclamation, of answering questions about who Jesus is and what he has done, and what he means for us today.]*
4. Do you know people who ask questions about Jesus but are not really interested in finding out who Jesus really is? People who use questions to avoid the reality of who Jesus is? How should we help them?

Prayer suggestions

1. That we never betray Jesus.
2. That many people ask genuine questions about who Jesus is, and we can help them find true answers.
3. That legal systems around the world act for true purposes, and do justice.