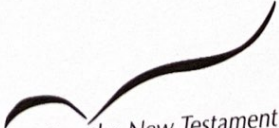


Reading John and 1, 2, 3 John

A Literary and Theological Commentary

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Reading the New Testament
2nd Series

Brant notes, this is another example of Johannine irony (2011, 242). The priests are orchestrating the death of someone just before Passover, under false charges (Num 35:33-34; John 7:14-8:59; Sheridan 2015, 177-80). This is a crime that not only defiles an individual but, recalling the distinction made by Jonathan Klawans in the discussion of 2:13-22, is also a sin that causes "moral impurity" (2000, 23-32). Unlike "ritual impurity," which was often incidental and unavoidable, moral impurity included culpability and could not be rectified by ritual cleansing alone; it defiled both the land and the temple, requiring divine intervention for purification. At the same time, however, Jesus' suffering *is* that divine intervention, since, as priests should, they here enact the killing of *the* superior Passover Lamb, namely, Jesus.

In John 18-19, therefore, Jesus fulfills the role of both the noble shepherd (10:1-18) and the "Lamb of God" (1:29). He is God's lamb, willingly submitting to the desires of God, his Shepherd, regardless of the cost (cf. Gen 21; Huizenga, 75-128). Jesus is the demonstration of God's love for the world (3:14-18), a sacrifice that certainly costs something from Jesus but also from God, whose love for Jesus is also emphasized in John's Gospel (3:35; 10:17-18; 15:9; 17:23-26; cf. Klawans 2006, 87). He is also the noble shepherd who shows his own sheep *how* to have life. He protects and preserves them, fulfilling his word that he did not lose or destroy (*apōlesa*) any of those whom God gave him (18:9; cf. 3:16; 6:39; 10:28; 17:12). In this series of events, Jesus, the *true* noble shepherd, faces down the imposters who surround him: from the midst of his disciples (Judas and Peter, 18:1-27), the Jewish elite who rally against him (18:15-19:22), and Rome as personified in the person of Pilate (18:28-42). Despite every temptation to abandon his sheep, Jesus remains steadfast, standing at the center of the storm swirling around him and focused on finishing the will of the Father.

A. John 18:1-27: Jesus' Arrest and Interrogation

John 18:1 resumes the action paused at 13:31. In 13:30, Judas disappeared into the night and Jesus followed with extended instruction for his disciples. Even though they did not yet understand, Jesus continues with God's will, which brings him to the garden in 18:1. The scene divides into two portions: vv. 1-12 recount Jesus' purposeful and powerful surrender in contrast to the foolishness of all those around him, especially Judas and Peter; vv. 13-27 describe Jesus' transportation to and interrogation by Annas, Caiaphas's father-in-law. Even though Peter and the other disciple follow Jesus, Peter's interrogation differs from Jesus' own. While Jesus speaks "well" and truthfully, Peter fulfills Jesus' words by denying him three times. Peter's cowardice

reveals the limits of his rash confession in 13:36-38; Jesus, not Peter, is the noble shepherd of this story.

A Powerfully Peaceful Surrender (vv. 1-12). In 18:1 Jesus travels with his disciples to a place across the Kidron Valley. Jesus selects a location known by his disciples, including Judas, "because Jesus used to gather there frequently with his disciples" (v. 3). Jesus' choice of this location shows that he is not hiding or seeking escape from his hour (comp. 7:4, 10; 8:59; 12:36; 18:20). It is now time. This location is not explicitly named in John, but as "the other side of the Kidron Valley" it is the Mount of Olives described also in Synoptic accounts (Brant 2011, 101). Margaret Daly-Denton (193-95) suggests that in focusing on the Kidron Valley, the Gospel reinforces its comparison of Jesus and David, who fled across the Kidron Valley when he was betrayed by his son, Absalom, and his close advisor, Ahithophel (2 Sam 15-17). Unlike David, however, who left Jerusalem to avoid his death, Jesus travels there to facilitate his own death. Jesus is not victimized by Judas's betrayal; he has known about it and he submits, not to Judas but to the Father, whose revelation of love comes through Jesus' death. Indeed, once Judas arrives with a superlative force of Roman soldiers (a cohort, which is 600 soldiers) and armed men (*hypēretas*) from the lead-priests and Pharisees, his work is done. This ridiculous crew of Roman and Jewish elite allies has come for a battle, but Jesus steps forward in v. 4 to assume full control of the scene.

Jesus does not wait for the army before him to approach, nor does he cower in fear of their massive show of force in the garden; instead he takes initiative because, as the narrator explains, he "knew everything that was coming against him" (v. 4). Jesus does not need an army to show his power. Verses 4-9 proceed in an ABAB pattern that underlines Jesus' control of what unfolds, as well as Judas's location with those rallied against his former teacher.

A. vv. 4-5, Question and Answer: "I am."

B. v. 6, The Power of Jesus' Words: Army's Retreat

A'. vv. 7-8, Question and Answer: "I am."

B'. v. 9, The Power of Jesus' Words: Release My Followers

In response to Jesus' self-revelation, "I am he" (*egō eimi*) in v. 5, the gathered forces, hands full of lanterns, torches, and weapons, immediately fall backward and to the ground in a forced retreat (v. 6). The scene is at once compelling and comedic. Powerful soldiers that the ruler of this world has mustered stand gathered, menacing before Jesus, with one of his own disciples at their head. Jesus, however, does not hesitate. As the embodiment of

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God's Word, he speaks and they falter. Their involuntary submission before Jesus' words shows his true kingship and his choice to die. He is no victim.

Peter, however, does not seem to understand the power of Jesus' words. Brant suggests that when Peter attacks Malchus, he has one of two aims in mind: either he is trying to die on Jesus' behalf, fulfilling his promise from 13:36-38, or he is trying to die alongside Jesus, as Thomas said they all would in 11:16 (2011, 236). If it is the former, perhaps Peter is trying to prompt Jesus to flee, although his flailing attack certainly pales in comparison to the power Jesus has just displayed in his words (18:5). If it is the latter, Peter is not only acting in accordance to the wrong person's words but is also trying to force the type of death that Jesus will die. Capital punishment was shameful, bringing dishonor to the one killed and to all who were associated with that person. For this reason, stories of people committing suicide before they could be convicted or captured, and certainly before they were executed, were not uncommon (e.g., Plato, *Crito*; Valerius Maximus, *Fact.* 9.12.4-7; Livy, 1.58; Josephus, *J.W.* 7.9.389-406; 1 Sam 31:1-6). By killing themselves, these people (women as well as men) looked to retain their honor as well as the honor of their households. Building on the work of Jennifer Glancy (2006, 2010), Brant notes that heroic deaths in the Roman world were active deaths, deaths in battle, where one's body was scarred with wounds on the front rather than marked with beatings on the back. Crucifixion, as the most shameful type of death, meant not only a back marked with scourging (John 19:1) but also pierced hands and feet, and a body displayed naked for all to see as life slowly drained from the victim. Powerful men did *not* die this way, and Peter, it seems, cannot imagine the Christ suffering such a fate; better for him to die in battle, like a real man (Glancy 2010, 30-33).

Jesus rebukes Peter by paraphrasing his words from 12:27: "Put your sword in its sheath! The cup which the Father has given to me, shall I not drink it?!" (18:11). Once again, the portrait of a reluctant Jesus from Mark's account is undermined (Mark 14:36). Moreover, unlike in Luke's story, Jesus does not heal the slave's ear after Peter's assault (Luke 22:51). Instead, the slave, ironically named "Malchus," which means "king," remains deformed. This could impact his service to the high priest, and it also demonstrates the inability of the high priest to protect him. Jesus and his followers are the ones who were surrounded by armed men, but they leave corporally whole; Jesus' words secure their safety, just as he said they would (18:9; 17:9-12). Already, Jesus is acting the part of the shepherd, the real king, by protecting his sheep from the wolves and thieves who threaten them.

When we recall that Rome was personified by wolves, having been founded by Romulus who was nursed with his brother by a she-wolf, the

image becomes even more striking (Livy, 1.4). Malchus's deformity opens him to ridicule in a first-century world that regularly evaluated character on the basis of physical appearance and ability (Parsons 2011, 17–66). As Glancy explains, however, it *also* reflects back upon his master, the high priest, since slaves stood in the place of their masters, often as “surrogate bodies” (2006, 24–25). Peter's attack on Malchus is an attack on the high priest himself, and it leaves “him” deformed. Malchus's injury would have diminished his ability to hear; indeed, in the scene to follow the high priest will show himself deaf to Jesus' words. Jesus' ability to shield Peter from repercussions is, therefore, all the more astounding, particularly in light of the blow Jesus receives when speaking to Annas in 18:22.

Speaking Nobly or Wickedly: Jesus and Peter (vv. 13–27). Jesus is then bound and taken to Annas, who is Caiaphas's father-in-law (v. 13). The trip first to Annas, rather than Caiaphas, is somewhat surprising, particularly because of the narrator's reminder of Caiaphas's role in plotting Jesus' death (v. 14; 11:45–53) and because Annas has not yet featured in the Gospel. Annas, however, *was* high priest from 6–15 CE, when he was deposed by the Roman procurator Gratus. Brant (2011, 237) and Keener (2003, 1089) emphasize that Annas would have continued to exert considerable influence because of his position. Indeed, Num 35:25–28 states that high priests were appointed until death, regardless of what Rome might say. Annas, moreover, remained connected to the men Rome recognized as high priests, being the father-in-law of Caiaphas as well as the father of five sons, all of whom were high priests at some point. Arrival before Annas, therefore, meant connection to one recognized as God's authority without this being an official trial, which would require Caiaphas's participation. As it was the Day of Preparation, Caiaphas could have been otherwise occupied before Jesus was eventually taken to him in John 18:24. Even then, Caiaphas does not appear in the story. His words from 11:49–50 are paraphrased in 18:14, and stand on their own as his judgment: “it is better for one person (*anthōpos*) to die on behalf of the people (*laou*).” He not only fails to protect his slave, Malchus, but also hands over one who—according to the world's perspective—was supposed to be his own sheep to die, rather than standing to suffer punishment himself.

Verses 15–27 set side by side the interrogations of Jesus by Annas and of Peter by various slaves in the courtyard. This is not an official trial scene; again, differing from Mark's account, Jesus only has one trial in John's Gospel—his trial before Pilate. The Romans and Jewish leaders are already working together in John 18:1–3, when Judas arrives with a mixed army to take Jesus. Warren Carter emphasizes that, in these scenes, the Jewish leaders and Pilate are allies, not enemies: “Roman troops could not have

Finishing the Father

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