



NG Study Guide: Matthew 26:57-75 "The King's Trial, pt. 1" [9.3.17]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: Our culture is becoming more and more hostile to Jesus, Christianity and Christians. Being a follower of Christ in the U.S. is rapidly becoming a dangerous commitment. A time may soon be coming when it will cost us dearly to publicly acknowledge Jesus; when we'll face great pressure to deny Him. Have you ever asked yourself, "Will I still be able to openly proclaim my faith in Jesus Christ if I know doing so will cause me, or my loved ones, suffering, loss, imprisonment, or death?" Even now, do you openly proclaim your faith in Jesus under the current pressures in our culture? The apostle Peter found himself in circumstances like these, and failed. What can we learn from his experience?

I. Jesus' illegal trial (read vv. 57-64)

The High priest was the top religious leader of Israel. John's gospel reveals they actually brought Jesus to Annas first (18:13-14). Annas was Caiaphas' father-in-law, and had been High Priest before him. Although he'd been removed from this position by the Romans, Annas still wielded considerable power behind the scenes.

Annas then sent Jesus to Caiaphas for the next phase of His "trial." The scribes and elders, i.e., the lawyers and religious leaders, were already assembled- the conspiracy against Jesus was well thought out ahead of time.

For all he'd promised Jesus about being willing to die for Him, when circumstances got scary, confusing and overwhelming, Peter abandoned Him like the rest of the disciples. However, unlike the others, Peter followed Jesus from afar to see what would happen to Him. He didn't want to be identified with Jesus, so he kept his distance.

Q1: How closely are you following Jesus right now? Is He far away? Are you way out ahead of Him? Or, are you right behind Him? Share with your group how you would describe your relationship with Jesus at this point in time.

The council was the Sanhedrin, the Supreme court of Israel, of whom the High Priest was head. No true evidence against Jesus could be found, so they tried to conjure up false testimony. Even the false witnesses couldn't present evidence to convict Him. Finally, two witnesses quoted Jesus saying He

would destroy the temple and build it in three days. Although those were Jesus' words, He was referring to His body, and predicting His resurrection. However, Caiaphas misinterpreted and misapplied them, essentially equating what He said to a threat of terrorism against their place of worship.

II. Jesus' unjust condemnation (read vv. 65-68)

Caiaphas pressed Jesus to respond to this accusation, and was unsuccessful until he placed Jesus under oath before God to answer. Jesus affirmed He was indeed the "Christ, the Son of God." Rather than believing Him, Caiaphas chose to accuse Jesus of blasphemy, and rallied the other religious leaders present to condemn Him to death. Caught up in a mob mentality, they began to abuse and mock Jesus.

Q2: Why did Jesus allow Himself to suffer like this? How could His Father in heaven watch and do nothing?

III. Peter's cowardly denial (read vv. 69-75)

Notice the progression of Peter's denial:

His first denial: "I don't know what you're saying!"

His second denial: He swore with an oath (e.g., "I swear I don't know Him!").

His third denial: He called on God as his witness and pronounced a curse of death on himself at God's hand if his words were untrue (e.g., "As God is my witness...let Him strike me dead if I'm lying!").

With each denial he moved further and further away from the Truth.

Just as Peter uttered his third denial, a rooster crowed- just as Jesus said would happen. Luke's record of this event reveals that right when this occurred Jesus looked over and made eye contact with Peter. How convicting this must have been! Peter is deeply convicted in his heart, and leaves the scene to go weep bitterly over how he let down His Savior.

Most of us will probably never face the kind of situation in which Peter found himself: deny Jesus and live; identify with Him and probably be killed. However, there are other ways Jesus can be denied, and each of us faces the temptation to deny Him regularly:

A. denying that Jesus is who He said He is

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" (John 14:6)

Jesus said He's the only way to God, salvation, or heaven. To deny this truth is to deny Him. Yet, to proclaim this is a dangerous thing in our culture today. So, we're tempted to deny it.

B. not acknowledging Jesus before others

"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33)

Some of us are comfortable keeping our faith in Jesus private. But, Jesus said we should "confess" Him, i.e., declare, profess, praise, or celebrate Him, before others. Hiding our faith in Jesus is another way of denying Him.

C. talking the talk but not walking the walk (being a hypocrite)

"They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work." (Titus 1:16)

True faith in Jesus Christ will manifest itself in how we live. Saying we believe in Jesus, yet living our lives in disobedience to Him, is hypocrisy and another way of denying Him.

Q3: How would you describe what your life is saying about Jesus right now?

Jesus willingly suffered and died for you and me because He loves us. If we place our faith in Him we will be reconciled to God, forgiven of our sins, and we'll spend eternity with Him in heaven. Does your life reveal the amazing truth of the gospel?

As followers of Jesus, we need to be willing to boldly proclaim our faith in Him to the world, regardless of the reactions we get- even if we suffer for it. We don't want to do what Peter did, and out of fear, deny Jesus. The God of the universe gave His all for us...we need to be willing to do the same for Him.

Study Guide Q's

Q4. What are some of the pressures in our culture today that make it difficult for a Christian to proclaim his/her faith in Jesus Christ?

Q5. Share about a time when you felt persecuted for being a follower of Jesus.

Q6. What can believers do to prepare themselves for increased persecution?

"Digging Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. Look up the following verses and write down what the bible says about denying: Matthew 10:33, 16:24; 2 Timothy 2:12-13; Titus 1:16; Jude 1:4; Revelation 2:13.

2. Think about your own life in terms of the various ways one can deny Jesus (denying that He is Who He said He is, not acknowledging Him before others, talking the talk but not walking the walk). In which of these ways have you denied Him? Confess them to the Lord and ask for His forgiveness and cleansing. If you're comfortable doing so, share some of these ways with your group.

3. The story of Peter's denial of Jesus is recorded in all four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). Take some time to carefully read each account, and make note of the different details revealed in each one. Re-read Matthew 26:31-46 as well. Write out your own account of this event, incorporating the information from all of the gospel accounts. What further insights did you receive as you did this exercise? Why do you think Peter denied Jesus? What could he have done to possibly prevent this from happening? If there is time, share your insights with your group.

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Go on a walk in your neighborhood one evening this week. As you pass each house, pray for your neighbors that live inside. Ask God to give you opportunity to show His love to them in some way.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

1. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
2. **Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
3. **The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
4. **Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. **What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.