



table of contents

john 18	2
john 18. ^{15-18, 25-26}	2
john 18. ³⁶	5
john 18. ³⁸⁻⁴⁰	9

John 18

John 18. ^{15-18, 25-26}

¹⁵And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. ¹⁶But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. ¹⁷Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, “Art not thou also one of this man’s disciples?”

He saith, “I am not.”

¹⁸And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself...

²⁵And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, “Art not thou also one of his disciples?”

He denied it, and said, “I am not.”

²⁶One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, “Did not I see thee in the garden with him?”

Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.

While the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) often overlap, reporting the same events, the Gospel of John overlaps and repeats what the other three Gospels report far, far less often. Peter’s denial of Jesus is one of those few events that is reported in all four Gospels. All four report that Peter denied knowing Jesus, not once, not twice, but three times.

One fully understands the first denial. We can easily imagine Peter being caught off guard. The second and then third are more difficult. Peter has plenty of time to think about things and how he will respond to the moment. Even with time to consider, Peter repeatedly denies. With the third, we cannot escape the fact that his denial is thought out and premeditated.

Of the four Gospels, Luke seems to go easiest on Peter. That said, only Luke reports that after Peter’s third denial, “the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.” Looking into Jesus’ eyes in that moment must have been brutal for Peter. We can easily understand why he “went out, and wept bitterly.”¹

Matthew and Mark do not hold back in reporting Peter’s denial. Here too, Peter’s first denial can, it seems, be explained by surprise, confusion, and unpreparedness. When a lowly female servant observed that Peter had traveled with Jesus in Galilee, Peter responded, “I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest.”² But his second and third denials were intense and seem to have come with thought behind them. Matthew reports that with his second denial, Peter resorted to religious language, denying “with an oath”³ his knowledge of and association with Jesus. When that failed to turn suspicion from him, he resorted to profanity as part of his final denial: “Then began he to curse and to swear.”⁴ In the end, Peter’s denial of Jesus is intense. There is nothing accidental or haphazard about it.

¹ Luke 22. ⁶¹⁻⁶²

² Mark 14. ⁶⁸

³ Matthew 26. ⁷²

⁴ Matthew 26. ⁷⁴ and Mark 14. ⁷¹

What about John? How does he deal with Peter's undeniable denials. At first glance, he seems to follow Luke in going easy on Peter. Whereas in the three synoptic Gospels, Peter is constantly facing challenging and threatening accusations about his association with Jesus, in John query takes the place of accusation. No doubt the queries contained an element of suspicion. Nevertheless, John seems to tone down the threat. The insignificant female servant asked, "Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?" "I am not," he answered simply. Those who stood with him around a fire asked, "Art not thou also one of his disciples?" "I am not," he replied again. Finally, an assistant to the High Priest asked, "Did not I see thee in the garden with him?" This question was more fraught with danger, as the questioner was also a relative to the man Peter had assaulted in the Garden of Gethsemane. "Peter," John informs us simply, "denied again." Overall, the threat to Peter seems less in John than in the other Gospels. Still, Peter denies knowing or associating with Jesus.

John does possess one unique feature that seems worth examining. John joins Mark in reporting that during the evening Peter was found warming himself near a fire. Neither Matthew nor Luke mentions this detail. In Mark, Peter was simply "warming himself." Peter could have been, for all we know, all by himself. In John, however, we are informed that Peter was not alone. "Servants and officers... who had made a fire of coals" "stood there." "And Peter stood with them."

"And Peter stood with them."

Now, we can read of Peter's warming himself as simple meteorological data—it was cold. We can read of his standing by the fire right along with everyone else as simply locational and indicative of the human need for warmth. But, might there be more to it? Might John be sending a message? Is it possible that in reporting how Peter warmed himself just like everyone else and stood right along "with them" John would have us understand that Peter had much closer affinity to those present at Jesus' trial than to Jesus? Peter was more like everyone else and less like Jesus. He wasn't, after all standing with Jesus, but with "servants and officers."

Throughout his narrative of Jesus' passion—arrest, trial, crucifixion—as, indeed, throughout his Gospel, John always seems to portray Jesus as standing apart and above everyone else. He is ever and always superior. These were some of his earliest and most oft repeated words about Jesus:

"This was he of whom I spake, 'He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.'"⁵

"He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."⁶

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, 'After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.'"⁷

In vision, the Book of Mormon's Lehi saw Jesus as "One descending out of the midst of heaven." "His luster was above that of the sun at noon day." In that same vision, he saw "twelve others following him." Their "brightness," he tells us "did exceed that of the stars in the firmament."⁸ Now, however bright the night stars might be, the light they shed upon the earth is no where near comparing to the light that the

⁵ John 1.¹⁵⁻¹⁷

⁶ John 1.²⁷

⁷ John 1.²⁹⁻³⁰

⁸ See 1 Nephi 1.⁹⁻¹⁰

noon-day sun shines on earth. The twelve may accompany Jesus, but they are not to be compared to him. They are far more different from him than they are similar.

Utilizing, apparently, an ancient Christian hymn, Paul proclaims the supremacy, the preeminence of Jesus, declaring, “that in all things he might have the preeminence.”⁹ We could go on. And on. And on. We could make resort to the New Testament’s Book of Hebrews; the entire Book one long discourse on the supremacy of Christ—supreme over Moses, supreme over angels, supreme over high priests, supreme over every creature under heaven. Supreme. Supreme. Supreme.

So, perhaps, John reminds us as part of his narrative on Peter’s denial of Jesus that Peter is more like everyone else, including those who are questioning and prosecuting Jesus in hopes of killing him, than he is different from them. His “standing with them” is about more than merely warming human flesh. He stands with them in not understanding Jesus. He stands with them in being entirely unlike him.

Indeed, the same can be said for all of us. We all have far more in common with each other—the best of us having more in common with the worst of us—than we do with Jesus? And in our own and multiple ways, we all deny him. Peter was right, really, and speaking for all of us when he repeatedly confessed on that fateful night, “I do not know the man.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 22, 2024)

⁹ Colossians 1.¹⁸

My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”

It was in the beginning of my discontent. I do not remember what year it was, sometime in the early to mid-80s, I would say. LDS General Conference fell on Easter weekend. During the Sunday sessions, only passing mention was made of the importance of the day. I remember sitting there thinking: “What the heck?” Hardly fifteen minutes could pass without remembrance of and pledges of allegiance to the living prophet, but hardly one word in remembrance of the Savior or commemoration of the momentous event 2000 years earlier.

I don’t know how it was for you during 2023’s Easter sacrament service, but my ward made a valiant effort to commemorate Easter as the day deserves—and as it has deserved for the past two thousand years. There was much more music. That was good. Our ward has some mighty fine voices that delivered some mighty fine musical texts. And if you are interested in things like congregational engagement, music is fundamental.

Then there were the Scripture readings. Without commentary. Marvelous. Why scripture readings without commentary are not part of *every* service is one of the great mysteries of Mormonism, or Latter-day Saintism, if you prefer.

There was less of the *spoken* word. Hallelujah! We could use a lot less of the spoken word in sacrament services. Whether it’s because the “speakers” lack the skill to keep the congregation engaged, or because the congregation lacks the ability to remain engaged, I don’t know. But congregational engagement during the spoken word is pathetic—no better than about 20% of the adults being engaged at any given moment. Either way, more of less spoken word would be much appreciated.

I will admit, however, that my appreciation for the service was tempered a bit when the final, and lone speaker openly confessed that the extra effort in conducting a more meaningful Easter service was the result of some supposed latter-day prophetic insight that Easter is actually important. I mean, come on! The importance of Easter has been blindingly obvious to any discerning believer for the past 2000 years. It ought not to require some latter-day prophetic revelation to understand the importance of Easter. The fact that the “Saints” required a latter-day prophetic oracle announcing the importance of Easter and “approval” for a more meaningful Easter service serves as sad reminder of the deep spiritual malaise that afflicts Latter-day Saintism. I mean its members can’t think or act on their own, but wait for direction that is rightfully theirs to obtain.

Still, though it was but a tiny step in the right direction, my ward gave it their all. Of course, those who planned the service still couldn’t bring themselves to fully acknowledge and embrace Jesus’ cross, the violence he suffered there, his violent death, or the revelation that the cross presents of the pervasiveness of human violence.

Now, I understand that Easter is the day of the Lord’s resurrection and that on that day we want to celebrate both the fact of his resurrection and the implication of our own resurrection. But we LDS folk do not do Lent, during which one considers, among other things, why we need atonement. Neither do we do any Holy Week celebration, including Good Friday services, during which we might, as Jacob

admonishes, “view his death.”¹ So, a Mormon Easter must pull double, even triple duty. It must address our spiritual death, Jesus’ death by crucifixion, Jesus’ resurrection, and the life Jesus returns to us. Otherwise, we are presented an Easter without context. To commemorate Jesus’ rise from death without recalling his torturous death is like remembering someone’s rescue without mention of what it was they were rescued from.

“Did you know that Charles was rescued?”

“Why, no! What happened? What was he rescued from?”

“Oh, don’t bother with that. Just be glad he was rescued?”

Talk about an incomplete story!

I have discussed in previous homilies and meditations the foolishness of the Mormon aversion to the cross. But perhaps I have not discussed, as befits the subject, the cross and the revelation of human violence that it represents—especially violence committed against vulnerable and, often, innocent individuals. I will take this opportunity in this meditation to briefly touch upon that revelation. It is, perhaps, human violence—especially that committed against the vulnerable and innocent—and our willing complicity in it that keeps us from truthfully examining the cross and acknowledging the tremendous revelation it represents concerning the vileness of human violence. It is perhaps our complicity in violence against the vulnerable and innocent that keeps Jesus’ death and cross out of Mormon theology and Easter services.

First, for a definition. We use the word, “violence,” to indicate any force—either physical, emotional, or verbal—that is used to inflict harm, damage, injury, or death upon another. The practitioner of violence is nearly always in some way superior to his target—the legislator or jurist with his ability to influence legislation or manipulate law, the wealthy using his money to appeal to the greed of others and influence attitudes and policies, the thief with his gun and the element of surprise it brings, the physical and emotional abuser with his superior physical strength or lack of empathy, etc. By the same token, the target of violence is nearly always possesses some pre-existing vulnerability to the perpetrator of violence.

According to the Gospel record, it was very early on in Jesus’ earthly ministry that he revealed his conclusion about and his attitude toward violence.² While the entire world, “civilized” and “uncivilized” alike, accepted and lived, as it does today, by the rule of “eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,” Jesus rejected it: “I say unto you, that ye resist not evil”—read “violence.”

In offering his critique of human violence, he presented what were then three common examples of human violence (being smitten on the cheek, being sued in court, and being forced to carry a soldier’s baggage), and suggested shockingly passive responses to that violence. The passive responses were to serve two purposes. First, the responses kept the violated from engaging in violence themselves and thus contributing to an ever-expanding spiral of violence. Just as importantly, the passive responses, it was hoped, would serve as revelation to the violator. The passive response would force the violator to have an honest look at the violence they perpetrated rather than the violence that came boomeranging back upon them. This revelation might lead to repentance and so less violence.

These examples remind us that the disciple is always to serve, first, not just as gospel messenger but as gospel message itself. The disciple is to sacrifice themselves, even their lives if necessary, in order to

¹ Jacob 1.8

² See Matthew 5.³⁸⁻⁴¹

reveal the gospel to others and expand its influence. They are to live peaceable and exemplify the rejection of violence so that others might learn from them and follow their example.

None of this is easy, as Jesus himself best exemplifies. Nevertheless, Jesus practiced what he preached. He sensed well in advance how his life would end. He warned his clueless disciples repeatedly that he “must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed” (Mt. 16.²¹). Nevertheless, when the time came, his disciples, exemplified by Peter, were prepared to use violent means to stop his unjust arrest and the violence that was being perpetrated against him. Jesus, however, would have none of it.

“Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?”³

What “must be” was not simply his atoning death. It was his death absent his own violent resistance. He would not, could not violently resist lest he contribute to and propagate the false logic of violence. Heaven would not, could not violently resist lest it contribute to and propagate the false logic of violence. Jesus’ submission to the cross was intended as revelation of human violence, especially as perpetrated against the innocent, and the necessity for the people of God to reject that violence.

Only a few hours after rejecting the disciples’ use of force and violence, Jesus was once more under necessity of preaching and living his non-violent rejection of violence as he stood before Rome’s agent, Pilate. Hearing rumors, Pilate sought to understand if Jesus truly thought of himself as a king and, if so, what kind of king he imagined himself to be and what kind of kingdom he envisioned. Jesus answered,

“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”⁴

Now, one can imagine any number of descriptions that Jesus might have given of his kingship and kingdom. But he settled on this one. “My kingdom does not use violence as the kingdoms of this world do.” Again, this serves to remind us that his own violent death was to reveal the senselessness of violence.

If Jesus thought to transform Pilate and deliver himself from his violent death through this instruction, he was disappointed. Jesus died as violent and grotesque a death as the kingdoms of this world had devised. In suffering the cross, Jesus revealed to the world how utterly serious he was when he had taught his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount that they not “resist evil.” In addition, the cross became a symbol of this world’s violence, especially its violence against vulnerable and innocent victims.

This revelation concerning violence has to be part of Easter celebrations—if not in the days leading up to Easter, then on Easter itself. The world needs this revelation. American Christianity needs this revelation. Mormonism needs this revelation. The Christian Easter, like the Jewish Passover with which it is historically so intimately connected, is the time above all other times to consider the violence we do. For example, American Christians might have used Easter 2023 to reconsider and repent of the current wave of ugly and vile violence that they are perpetrating against the LGBTQ community. It might have used Easter to reconsider and repent of its historic and ongoing violence against African Americans. It might have used Easter to reconsider and repent of its growing anti-Semitic violence against American Jews.

This reconsideration and repentance is not easy. It requires honest introspection. It requires an honest look

³ Matthew 26.⁵⁰⁻⁵⁴

⁴ See John 18.³³⁻³⁷

at the world we have created. It requires, as Jesus exemplified, self-sacrifice, often painful and humiliating. And it begins with Jesus' revelation on and from the cross.

But, alas, at least among the Mormons with whom I associate, Easter passed without a true look at all its meanings and revelations. Another Easter passed without a truthful look at the violence we do or the call that Jesus issued from the cross that we repent of it ourselves and act as the kind of revelation to others that is necessary for their repentance. Perhaps next year, as Jews say in concluding Passover. Perhaps during Easter 2024, we can add this to the enhanced music, the added scripture readings, and the reduced spoken word of Easter 2023—all a good first step in what looks to be a very long journey.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 22, 2024)

³⁸...And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, “I find in him no fault at all.” ³⁹But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?”

⁴⁰Then cried they all again, saying, “Not this man, but Barabbas.”
Now Barabbas was a robber.

It ought to be abundantly clear that the entire MAGA movement with its messianic expectations of tRUMP is a cult. It is an American Christian heresy of epic and historic proportions. One for the history books. This was brought home to me again this week as I have prepared for the holiest week of the Christian calendar in lead up to its holiest holiday, Easter.

As I scanned through my Twitter feed, I was jolted by this tweet from an ardent supporter of one of the greatest con artists; one of the most committed and consistent criminals; to one of the most immoral individuals in American history:

“Jesus was arrested Easter week. Trump will be arrested Easter Week.”¹

I am not making this up. It is beyond my humble ability to make up something so grotesque and blasphemous. To call it grotesque and blasphemous is an understatement of gargantuan proportions. I cannot begin to say how repulsed and disgusted I am at such heresy and blasphemy—or, if I can say, I dare not, lest I issue forth with the most offensive profanity I can string together.

I thought of this grotesquery as I read the passage above. It is part and parcel of antisemitism’s hateful doctrine that Jews are fair game for violence because they killed Jesus. And, when given a chance, they sacrificed him in order to deliver a thief and gangster. But our blasphemous Tweeter reminds us just how complicit are we all—Jew, Christian, atheist, etc., etc.—in Jesus’ death.

Tragically, and destructively, this blasphemous Tweeter has done as the multitude did all those years ago. He has chosen a criminal over Jesus. But, far different than that multitude of long ago, who probably did not know the criminal before and never heard of or saw him again, this Twitting blasphemer has followed and intends to follow this American criminal to the bitter end—and the end will be bitter.

Yes, this ungodly blasphemer has shouted aloud from his rooftop; sent it out for all the world to hear: “Crucify him. Crucify Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, the Holiest and Kindest and most Faithful of friends.” In choosing to follow this American criminal, he with his fellow MAGA heretics crucify Jesus anew.

Such Tweets as this MAGA Tweeter’s convinces one that the Lord was within His rights when He warned that “the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the wicked *without measure*.”² What punishment can be deemed to severe for such blasphemers? How long can it be before the Romans come and burn down all the Christian churches and temples? If things continue as they are, it can’t come too soon or too fast or too brutal as far as I am concerned. I am beyond the point of praying for the MAGA mob. They are past feeling, it seems. I pray against them.

¹ A false prophecy by a false prophet, as it turns out, for the man was not arrested.

² DC 1.⁹

*O God, how long shall the adversary reproach?
shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?*³

*Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man:
seek out his wickedness till thou find none.*⁴

*Break his teeth, O God, in his mouth:
break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD.*

*As a snail which melteth, let him pass away:
like the untimely birth of a woman, that he may not see the sun.*⁵

*Let him be as chaff before the wind:
and let the angel of the LORD chase him.
Let his way be dark and slippery:
and let the angel of the LORD persecute him.*⁶

*As smoke is driven away,
so drive him away:
as wax melteth before the fire,
so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.*⁷

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 22, 2024)

³ Psalm 74.¹⁰

⁴ Psalm 10.³⁻⁷

⁵ Psalm 58.^{6, 8}

⁶ Psalm 35.⁵⁻⁶

⁷ Psalm 68.²