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DANGEROUS DENIAL

The religious authorities had set their trap. In John 18, Jesus seems to walk right in. Judas led a band of soldiers with lanterns and weapons, part of an extra detachment of Roman troops on guard during Jewish festivals, due to political and messianic zealots. Tonight, they're after public enemy number one.

Jesus, knowing ALL that will happen to Him, steps forward. "*Whom do you seek?*" He asks. "*Jesus of Nazareth,*" they say. "*Ego eimi, I AM, I am He.*" They all draw back and fall to the ground. A remarkable response by crack soldiers unafraid of anything. But they are outnumbered 1,000 to 1. Jesus, the One, speaks the "I AM" personal name of Jehovah, declaring His deity. Then the Good Shepherd says, "*let these others go,*" as He provides the physical and spiritual protection He had prayed in John 17.

Peter, determined not to deny Jesus, brandishes a sword and cuts off Malchus' ear. Jesus heals him and says, "*put your sword away; shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me?*" Jesus had just prayed in the garden "*let this cup pass from Me*" if there could be any other way. Because it is the "*wine of God's wrath*" spoken in the Psalms, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Yet, Jesus is obedient, even unto death. Not only will Jesus die for sins, He must bear the wrath of God against sin, to fulfill holiness. The cup of the new covenant is the blood of Christ, poured out to bear sin and the punishment for sin. Your sin.

Betrayed, Jesus is arrested, then accused. The high priest Caiaphas had said in John 11, "**one man should die for the people**" not knowing what he was prophesying. The irony! Jesus IS the ONE man, the real "high priest" of Israel, who will make atonement - with the sacrifice of His own life. Jesus will avert not the wrath of human kings but the Holy One, the Sovereign Lord over all. Despite the irregular and illegal activities of the conspirators, God is orchestrating behind the scenes, to accomplish His will.

The Old Testament prophesied Messiah as forsaken, abandoned - left alone to face His accusers, without advocate. The religious authorities repeatedly broke their own rules and God's laws. No charges were brought. He was questioned by men without authority. Testimony of at least two or three witnesses was required, but Peter and John were ignored in the courtyard. Jesus was physically mistreated. False evidence and false witnesses were brought against Him "*who was without sin.*" The Sanhedrin court was forbidden to meet at night, nor for a capital case on the eve of a Sabbath or feast day. The death penalty could not be declared on the day of a trial. All violated. Typical politics? Tragedy of justice!

That's not all. Peter was also interrogated, informally. "*I am not,*" said Peter when a servant girl asks if he is Jesus' disciple. What a contrast to Jesus boldly declaring to the soldiers, "**I AM HE.**" Such is the nature of denial. Perhaps Peter thought he was careful, circumspect, even surreptitious. Surely he was downcast from having failed to prevent the arrest of Jesus. Still determined not to deny him, Peter missed how easily he actually does deny Him. How much like Peter WE are - as the darkness of denial lurks in our DNA too. Just like Peter "the rock" you're not as strong as you think.

As Jesus is led away, Peter again denies Him. A relative of Malchus asks, "*did I not see you in the garden with Him?*" Mere moments before, Peter declared his readiness to die for Jesus. Now, Matthew says Peter denies Him, with an oath. Then, that haunting horrible crow of the rooster. Immediately Peter remembers Jesus' words in John 13, that he would deny the Lord three times before the rooster crows. Luke says their eyes met. Then Peter went out and wept - bitterly.

What would you do? What DO you do? Betrayed. Arrested. Abandoned. Accused. Denied. Jesus is on trial in your life, 24/7. How many times a day do you deny Him? In your words, actions, attitudes? Will you be trapped by the wiles of the world and its anti-God way of thinking? By your own fleshly lusts for your will, not His will? By the lies of the devil, who twists God's truth? When you don't take up your cross and deny yourself, you deny Jesus - doing the opposite of what He prayed for you in John 17.

In the dangerous calling of discipleship, traps are legion. Determination will not deter denial. Your flesh will not prevail in spiritual battle. Only the Holy Spirit can. With the truth of God's Word, He equips you with the armor of God, so you stand firm. Have you denied Him? Repent and receive Christ's grace! By the Holy Spirit's power, trust and obey Jesus - step by step, moment by moment. Not the treadmill of sin, confess, repeat. Going - not from defeat to defeat - but from strength to strength. 24/7. His strength!