

April 15– Read John 18:1-11. The Jewish religious leaders were given authority by the Romans to make arrests for minor infractions. The Roman soldiers may not have participated in the arrest but accompanied the Temple guards to make sure matters didn't get out of control. Judas' kiss is not recorded here, but his kiss marked a turning point for the disciples. With Jesus' arrest, each one's life would be radically different. For the first time, Judas openly betrayed Jesus before the disciples. For the first time, Jesus' loyal disciples ran away from him. The band of disciples would undergo severe testing before they were transformed from hesitant followers to dynamic leaders. What do you notice as you compare how Jesus and Peter responded to these threats? "Drinking the cup" means to actively accept what the Father has intended. How does Jesus show his willingness to drink the cup?

April 16. Read John 18:12-24. Both Annas and Caiaphas had been high priests. Annas held the position from A.D. 6 to 15. Caiaphas held it from A.D. 18 to 36/37. According to Jewish law, the office of High Priest was held for life. Many Jews, therefore, still considered Annas the high priest but Caiaphas made the final decisions. Both of them cared more about their political ambitions more than about their responsibility to lead the people of God. Though religious leaders, they had become evil. As the nation's spiritual leaders, they should have known that Jesus was the Messiah about whom the Scriptures spoke, and they should have pointed people to him. But when deceitful men and women pursue evil, they want to eliminate all opposition. Instead of honestly evaluating Jesus' claims based on their knowledge of Scripture, these religious leaders sought to further their own selfish ambitions and were even to kill God's son, if that's what it took, to do it.

April 17. Read John 18:25-37. The other three Gospels say that Peter's three denials happened near a fire in the courtyard outside Caiaphas's palace. John places the first denial outside Annas' home and the other two denials outside Caiaphas's homes. This was very likely the same courtyard. The high priest's residence was large, and Annas and Caiaphas most likely lived near each other. By Jewish law, entering the house of a Gentile would cause a Jewish person to be ceremonially defiled. As a result, he could not take part in worship at the Temple or celebrate the festivals until he was restored to a state of "cleanness." Afraid of being defiled, these men stayed outside the house where they had taken Jesus for trial. They kept the ceremonial requirements of their religion while harboring murder and treachery in their hearts. In what areas of our lives are we tempted to do the same thing?

April 18. Read John 18:38-19:16. Pilate was cynical; he thought all truth was relative. To many government officials, truth was whatever the majority of people agreed with or whatever helped advance their own personal power and political goals. When there is no basis for truth, there is no basis for moral right and wrong. Justice becomes whatever works or whatever helps those in power. In Jesus and his Word we have a standard for truth and for our moral behavior. Throughout the trial we see that Jesus was in control, not Pilate or the religious leaders. Pilate vacillated, the Jewish leaders reacted out of hatred and anger, but Jesus remained composed. He knew the truth, he knew God's plan, and he knew the reason for his trial. Despite the pressure and persecution, Jesus remained unmoved. It was really Pilate and the religious leaders who were on trial, not Jesus. When you are questioned or ridiculed because of your faith, remember that while you may be on trial before your accusers, they are on trial before God.

April 19. Read John 19:17-42. Crucifixion was a Roman form of execution. The condemned man was forced to carry his cross along a main road to the execution site, as a warning to the people. Death came by suffocation because the weight of the body made breathing difficult as the victim lost strength. This was normally a slow and painful death. (Because of the beatings and flogging, Jesus was already very physically weak from loss of blood). The sign on the cross was meant to be ironic. A king, stripped nearly naked and executed in public view, had obviously lost his kingdom forever. But Jesus, who turns the world's wisdom upside down, was just coming into the Kingdom. His death and resurrection would strike the deathblow to Satan's rule and would establish Jesus' eternal authority over the earth. Few people reading the sign that day understood its real meaning, but the sign was absolutely true. All was not lost. Jesus was King of the Jews – and of the Gentiles, and of the whole universe.

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