

John 18:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not.

Analysis

The doorkeeper's casual question initiates Peter's tragic denials: "**Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?**" (Μὴ καὶ σὺ ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν εἶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τούτου; / Mē kai sy ek tōn mathētōn ei tou anthrōpou toutou). The particle μή (mē) expects a negative answer—she's not accusing but curiously asking, perhaps noticing Peter's provincial Galilean accent (Matthew 26:73). The phrase "this man" (τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τούτου/tou anthrōpou toutou) carries subtle contempt—not "Jesus" or "the rabbi," but dismissively "this man."

The adverb "also" (καί/kai) suggests she already knew John was a disciple, making Peter guilty by association. Her question wasn't threatening—just a servant's idle curiosity—yet it shattered Peter's resolve. Hours earlier he had declared, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matthew 26:35). Moments ago he had drawn a sword against armed soldiers (v.10). Now a slave girl's simple question breaks him.

"He saith, I am not" (λέγει, Οὐκ εἰμί/legei, Ouk eimi)—Peter's denial directly inverts Jesus's repeated "I am" (Ἐγώ εἰμι/Egō eimi) declarations. Where Jesus boldly proclaimed divine identity (v.5, 8), Peter shamefully denies human association. The emphatic negation Οὐκ εἰμί (Ouk eimi, "I am not") echoes throughout the courtyard—Peter's first step into apostasy, fulfilling Jesus's prediction (13:38).

Historical Context

The courtyard setting was semi-public, with servants, guards, and officials mingling around a charcoal fire (v.18). Admitting discipleship could result in arrest or at least interrogation and possible beating. Peter's fear was not entirely irrational—association with condemned criminals was dangerous under Roman occupation. Yet Jesus had just demonstrated that His followers would be released (v.8-9), and John stood openly in the courtyard as a known disciple. For John's readers, this account served multiple purposes: honest reporting of apostolic failure, warning against denial under persecution, and highlighting Christ's foreknowledge and grace. Peter's restoration (John 21:15-17) would follow, demonstrating that failure isn't final.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Why did a servant girl's casual question break Peter when armed soldiers did not?
2. How does Peter's 'I am not' contrast with Jesus's 'I am' declarations, and what does this reveal about discipleship?
3. What is the difference between rational caution in persecution and sinful denial of Christ?

Interlinear Text

λέγει οὗν ἡ παιδίσκη ἡ θυρωρός τῷ Πέτρῳ
saith Then G3588 the damsel G3588 that kept the door G3588 unto Peter
G3004 G3767 G3814 G2377 G3588 G4074

Μὴ καὶ σὺ ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν εἰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου
not also thou one of G3588 disciples Art G3588 man's
G3361 G2532 G4771 G1537 G3101 G1488 G444

τούτου λέγει ἐκεῖνος Οὐκ εἰμί³
this saith He not I am
G5127 G3004 G1565 G3756 G1510

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