

PETER'S DENIAL (Mk. 14:66-72)

Mk. 14:66 And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: 67 And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. 68 But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. 69 And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. 70 And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto. 71 But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak. 72 And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.

Apart from the Lord Jesus, the apostle Paul was the greatest missionary *ever*, and he was not beyond admitting his failings. He described how he found himself, - to his utter disgrace, - doing that which he knew was wrong. There was a spiritual battle going on inside him that no matter how hard he tried, the enemy seemed to be winning. How could he repel such a powerful opponent? And then he replied to his own question, **Rom. 7:25** *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. ... The chorus says ...*

Christ is the answer to my every need;
Christ is the answer, He is my friend indeed;
Problems of life my spirit may assail,
With Christ my Saviour, I shall never fail,
For Christ is the answer to my need.

On the evening Peter crept his way into the garden of the palace of the high priest Caiaphas, he sat down at the fire, in the early hours of the morning, with men and women who had no love for Jesus. Peter was as *low* as he had been at any time in his life. Within those last few hours, he had done what he said he would never do for he had run off and abandoned His Lord. ... And to make matters worse, instead of trying to get up out of the dilemma, he dug himself deeper into it. ... Before, he was full of self-esteem, self-confidence, and personal pride for what he considered himself to be able to be and to do ... but all of that served to demonstrate the sin in his heart. ... That is where sin begins, as King Solomon wrote, **Prov. 21:4** *An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.*

Peter was a believer, - there is no doubt about that, - but he had backslidden, because he was a genuine believer and a follower of Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, he was not perfect ... and when he 'slipped up' in the high priest's garden, he did it not just once, not just twice, but three times.

Just in case we use Peter to make excuses for ourselves, what happened to Peter was not necessary. We know from personal experience what it is like to fall short of what our Saviour expects.

So, let's look at Peter. The previous evening he had spent with Jesus and the other eleven disciples. At midnight he had gone with them, - ten by now, for Judas Iscariot had left them, - and they were in the Garden of Gethsemane. Then when Jesus was betrayed by Judas, Peter ran off with the rest ... but he ran only so far because he stopped, came back and entered the high priest's garden.

Previously, - before all this took place, - Jesus had been praying for this particular time in Peter's life, **Lk. 22:31** *Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: ³² But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.* ... Knowing what was up ahead, Jesus had been praying, and Peter should have been prepared.

As we have already considered, in our previous study, Jesus had been arrested, bound, and taken to Annas and then to the palace to appear before Caiaphas, the high priest. He was brought into an open-air enclosure where the cries and shouts of the Sanhedrin would have been heard, especially in the quiet hours of the morning. ... So, what is Peter doing, sitting outside around the fire, along with those people who had neither love nor time for Jesus? ... He is there because, - despite how he ran off ... and he knew he should not have, - ... nonetheless, he is there because he never stopped loving the Lord.

He must have run so far, 'caught himself on', and turned back in time to see where all those Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers had taken Jesus ... and then he sneaked back. He could not get to Jesus because they had taken Him in before Annas, and then Caiaphas. ... So, he is outside in the courtyard in the middle of the night, frightened, apprehensive, *and very grieved with himself.* ... Caught between the dilemma of fear and the disappointment of his faith.

To add to his woes ... while he was sitting quietly and contemplatively by the fireside, he was caught completely off-guard by a young girl who thought she had seen him before, on some occasion with Jesus. She wasn't, of course, the only one round the fire ... The Gospel of John tells us there were also Roman soldiers and temple guards there (Jn. 18:18), - it was quite an unsafe place for Peter to be.

Anyway, ‘out of the blue’, the young girl who let Peter (and John) in (Jn. 18:16) confronted him and let him know she thought she had previously seen him with Jesus, **Mk. 14:47** And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.. He flatly denied it, **68** But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest ... **Mt. 26:70** But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest ... **Lk. 22:57** And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not ... and the young girl did not pursue it, but it made Peter nervous, **And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.** ... And then, also, I wonder when he got up and went out to the porch/corridor ... I wonder if it troubled him how he wasn’t taking his stand for Jesus, like he had said he would earlier. He had committed himself to the promise that even if everyone else would abandon the Saviour, he wouldn’t ... and yet, he *did* abandon Jesus. ... Sitting around the fire could not have been easy for him!

The truth is though he didn’t stand up for Jesus for it probably would have meant he would have been arrested too ... and he was too much in the depths of despair and failure to go through all that. So, he left Jesus to go through it on His own, as Jesus prophesied he would. ... **Is. 53:3** ... we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

And then he was picked out again ... a similar thing, **69** And a maid saw him again [*i.e. another one*], and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them [*i.e. of the disciples*]. ... She told everyone else, This is one of them ... obviously they had been talking about him, wondering if what the first young girl had said was true. They would have been combining their recollections, and they were more certain now that Peter *was* a follower of Jesus. When he replied this time, he was much more forceful and vigorous, **70** And he denied it again. ... Matthew says, **Mt. 26:72** And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man [*I’m not one of His followers*]. ... and Luke says, **Lk. 22:57** And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. ... The first time he denied Jesus was possibly because he was caught off-guard ... but to do it a second time was not only careless, but it was also *intended* ... it was *calculated*. ... There was no excuse for the second time! ... He should have been out of there as quick as possible! Besides, he said he would never leave Jesus ... Well, Jesus was *inside* being harangued by the Sanhedrin, but Peter was sitting *outside* round the fire warming himself with Jesus’ enemies! According to how he promised, Peter should have been with the Lord, in the courtroom.

He clearly wasn't though, and then ... ⁷⁰ And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto. ... Your accent gives you away! ... **Mt. 26:73** And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee [*your accent shows it*]. ... **Lk. 22:59** And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean. ... What was he still doing there?!! ... And the brother of the man whose ear he cut off was there too, **Jn. 15:26** One 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? ... Yes, he did ... he did see Peter there, but **Jn. 15:27** Peter then denied again ... **Mt. 26:74** Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man ... **Mk. 14:71** But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak ... **Lk. 22:60** And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest.

And that is Peter ... 'lying through his teeth', as we say ... just as Jesus prophesied he would. He is really 'touching and scraping the bottom' now. ... And then the cock crowed, v.72 ... Even though Jesus prophesied it would happen, it did not happen because Jesus *made* Peter respond the way he did, - this was entirely Peter's own responsibility for his denial of the Saviour. Peter had been warned, but he failed to take heed. ... And Luke describes it as if a sword pierced his heart, **Lk. 22:60** And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. ⁶¹ And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. ... Peter would *never* have forgotten *that* look! ... Peter, you boasted in yourself ... Peter, you did not listen to what Jesus told you about how Satan wanted to sift you as wheat ... You thought you were untouchable, but you opened the floodgates to the enemy, and only the Saviour prayed for you, you would be finished for you would have been lost! ... And something else Peter, Jesus commanded you specifically in the Garden of Gethsemane to pray that you would *not* **Mk. 14:38** enter into temptation. ... And Peter, instead of praying *you slept!* You did not pray because you took no heed of how the Saviour instructed you ... you acted too fast and endangered your relationship with Him ... and immediately the cock crew.

The only right place for Peter to have been in those early hours of the morning was *not* out in the garden denying Jesus ... If Peter would have been true to his word and done what he said he would do ... Peter would have been in that court, standing alongside Jesus. He would have done far better him standing up with the Saviour, rather than sitting down in the company of those unregenerates around the fire! ... We need to be careful of our company ...

Being with Jesus, - no matter what the circumstances were, - was the safest option for He had already said in Caesarea Philippi, **Mt. 16:18** *thou art Peter, and upon this rock [i.e. your confession of faith, 16 Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God] I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ... Peter, do you not remember that conversation? Peter, He prayed to His Father in the Garden for you, Jn. 17:15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.*

And the Lord's prayer was answered because even though Peter was not at the cross with the Saviour, - where he ought to have been, - ... because the Lord prayed for him, he *was* one of the first at the empty tomb, and he *was* the lead-disciple in the upper room prior to the Day of Pentecost, when one hundred and twenty were gathered to pray and wait for the Holy Spirit, and he was the preacher God chose to expound that powerful sermon the Lord used to save thousands of Jewish souls.

Yes, when Peter realised what he had done, - what he had allowed to happen, - ... and when he saw the Saviour ... beaten, spat upon, punched, humiliated, the hairs on His face pulled, - ... when he saw the Saviour looking into his sad eyes, - **Lk. 22:61** *Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. 62 And Peter went out, and wept bitterly ... He sobbed and sobbed with a broken heart, for denying His Lord.*

He does not believe in himself anymore, and indeed, he could have run away off and given up altogether ... but Jesus promised He wouldn't lose him ... and He didn't. After the resurrection, Peter had returned with some other of the disciples to Galilee, and were fishing in their boats ... They did not know it, and they weren't expecting it ... but Jesus had breakfast prepared for them on the shore of Galilee. He had left the tomb and gone up there to find them, - and He called them to the shore. In particular, around *another* fire, the Saviour addressed Peter, **Jn. 21:15** *So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. 16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. 17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. ... Peter was restored to His Master. ... The Lord found him and brought him*

back, and the Lord kept Him, **Jn. 17:12** those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost. ...

How easy the story could have ended up in spiritual tragedy ... but the Saviour, - as He had promised, - brought Peter 'back from the brink' ... and the apostle wrote about it in his epistle, **I Peter 2:25** ye were as sheep going astray [*... that was how he had been in the garden and at the cross*]; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop [*overseer*] of your souls. ... He had been *returned* to the Saviour. God's grace had kept him, **I Peter 2:21** For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: **22** Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: **23** Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. ... Looking back on it, Peter remembered that night, and how the Saviour had completed all He came to do.

How good is the God we adore,
Our faithful unchangeable Friend;
His love is as great as His power,
And knows neither measure nor end.